TOBIAS O' THE LIGHT

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The wallowing motor-boat was still right side up. There seemed to be but one person in it. (See Page 67)

TOBIAS O' THE LIGHT

A STORY OF CAPE COD

BY

JAMES A. COOPER

AUTHOR OF "CAP'N ABE, STOREKEEPER" AND
"CAP'N JONAH'S FORTUNE"

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOSEPH WYKOFF

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BOOKS BY
JAMES A. COOPER

CAP'N ABE, STOREKEEPER
CAP'N JONAH'S FORTUNE
TOBIAS O' THE LIGHT

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. A Cry in the Night
II. Confidences
III. The Apex of the Storm
IV. Prophecies
V. The Unexpected
VI. Dead Men's Shoes
VII. A Newcomer
VIII. Philosophy and Other Things
IX. The Drop of Wormwood
X. Starting Something
XI. The Black Squall
XII. Troubled Waters
XIII. Cross Purposes
XIV. A Variety of Happenings
XV. Decisive Action
XVI. Poison
XVII. Real Trouble

XVIII. A Clue

XIX. Suspicions

XX. Put to the Question

XXI. The Rising Tide of Doubt

XXII. What Frets Lorna

XXIII. More than Weather Indications

XXIV. Understanding

XXV. Across the Years

XXVI. High Tide

XXVII. What the Night Brought

XXVIII. Desperation

XXIX. Daybreak

XXX. A Silver-Banded Pipe

ILLUSTRATIONS

The wallowing motor-boat was still right side up. There seemed to be but one person in it.(See Page67) . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"I'll run up to the light to dress," she said

"Oh, sugar, Heppy! What's the matter o' ye?"

"We must do something!" she cried. "Tobias! We *must*!"

TOBIAS O' THE LIGHT

CHAPTER I

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

Old Winter wrapped in his grave clothes stalked the flats and sand dunes about the Twin Rocks Light. Spring had smiled at the grim old fellow only the day before. She would flutter back again anon to dry the longshore wastes and warm to life the scant herbage that tries its best to clothe the Cape Cod barrens.

But now the wind blew and the sleet charged against the staff of the lighthouse, masking thickly the glass that defended the huge Argand lamp. Its steady ray filtered through this curtain with difficulty.

Tobias Bassett pulled on his oilskins and buckled down the sou'wester over his ears preparatory to venturing upon the high gallery to scrape the clinging snow from the glass.

"You have a care what you're doing up there, slipping around outside the light," advised his sister Hephzibah, who should have been named "Martha," being cumbered by so many cares. "You ain't so young as you used to be, Tobias."

"And you don't have to throw it up to me. I know my age well enough without looking into the family Bible, Heppy," chuckled the lightkeeper. "I'm sure you ain't changed *it*. I ain't cal'latin' to be like old Miz' Toomey that when she went to vote for the first time told the poll clerk she was thirty-six years old but had lived in this district fifty-four years. I ain't goin' to let go all holts yet. Leastways, not while I'm climbing about that gallery!"

"You'd ought to have an assistant, Tobias," sighed his sister, who was preparing supper, always served at an early hour in winter on the Cape. "A young fellow to do the hard work. The Government ought to give you one."

"They think one man to a stationary lamp like this is enough. But I can have a helper if I want one," her brother announced.

"Then, why don't ye?"

"'Cause I'd have to pay his wages out o' my own pay check, and feed him in the bargain," chuckled the lightkeeper. "I figger we can't afford that."

"Oh, dear!" croaked the lachrymose Heppy, "if Uncle Jethro Potts would only leave us some of his money when he dies. The good Lord knows we need it as much as ary rel'tive he's got."

"Wal," commented Tobias, picking up his lighted lantern, "Jethro Potts has got to slip his cable pretty soon to do us much good, Heppy. We're getting kind o' along in years to enjoy wealth."

"Speak for yourself, Tobias Bassett!" said his sister, more energetically. "I ain't too old to know what to do with money—if I had it."

"Ho, ho!" ejaculated her brother. "Slipper's on t'other foot, ain't it? I wonder what age you give the poll clerk?" and he went out of the kitchen chuckling.

He mounted the spiral stairway leading up through the lighthouse. After passing the level of the second story, where were the family bedrooms, at intervals there were narrow windows—mere slits in the masonry. These were blocked with glass and only on the leeward side could Tobias see through them.

"Winter's dying hard," was his comment, climbing steadily to the lamp room. "This squall come as sudden and as savage as ary storm we've had this winter. And the sleet sticks to the glass like all kildee!"

He stepped into the lamp room, closing the door at the top of the stairway. It was warm in here, with a strong and sickish smell of burning oil. He shaded his eyes with the sharp of his hand to look into the lamp, the wick of which he had ignited half an hour before.

It was burning evenly and with a white clear light. But warm as the lamp room was and strong as was the reflection of the light upon the outer panes, the sleet had frozen to the glass, making a lacework curtain which the warning ray of the lamp could pierce only with difficulty.

Tobias took a steel scraper and an old broom, opened a door at the back, and went out upon the leeward gallery of the light. The snow wraiths swept past the staff on either hand, whipping away over the sand dunes and disappearing in the pall of darkness that hovered over the land.

When he ventured around to the front gallery he found a pallid radiance on the sea superinduced by the muffled ray of the lamp. The snow, driven by the gale, plastered the light tower on this side from its cap ten feet above the lamp to that point twenty feet above its base to which the spray from the wavecaps was thrown. There was a drift of snow, too, on the railed balcony, through which the lightkeeper waded.

"Whew!" he gasped, turned his back to the blast, and began using the scraper vigorously. "I can see I've got an all night's job at this off an' on if this sleet holds to it. Ain't going to be heat enough from that old lamp to melt the ice as fast as it

makes."

He muttered this into the throat-latch of his storm coat while using the scraper. The frozen sleet rattled down in long ribbons. He dropped the scraper finally and seized his broom. It was then that he first heard that cry which was the tocsin of the unexpected series of events which marched into Tobias Bassett's life out of this late winter storm.

He dropped the broom and strained his ears for a repetition of the cry. Was it the voice of some lost seafowl swept landward on the breast of the storm? A gale out of the northeast brought many such to be dashed lifeless at the foot of the lamp tower.

There was a human quality to this sound he had heard that startled Tobias. If from the sea, then the craft on which the owner of the voice was borne, was doomed.

There had not been a wreck on the Twin Rocks within the present lightkeeper's experience. He shuddered to think of the horror of such a catastrophe.

A vessel driven upon the grim jaws of the reef that here were out-thrust from the sands, would be wracked to mere culch within the hour. The life savers from Lower Trillion could never put off a boat or shoot a line into the teeth of such a gale as this.

Tobias stooped for the broom again. Then he heard the cry repeated. If it came on the wings of the wind——

He scrambled around to the leeward side of the tower. Here the savage pæan of the storm was muffled. The drumming of the waves on the rocks, the eerie shriek of the wind, the clash of the snow and sleet as they swept by, left the lightkeeper in a sort of unquiet eddy.

Against the gale came a repetition of the cry—a faint "Ahoy!"

Tobias struggled with the latch of the lamp room door, and finally got inside the tower. He hurried to the stairway and descended to the warm and odorous kitchen where Heppy was heaping the brown and flaky fishcakes upon the platter on the stove-shelf.

"What is the matter with you to-night, Tobias Bassett?" she demanded. "You're as uneasy as a hen on a hot brick. Where are you going now?" as he started for the outer door.

"There's somebody out in this storm," he told her. "I heard 'em shouting."

"For love's sake! In a boat?"

"No. From the land side. Somebody on the road."

Tobias banged the door behind him. In clear weather there was not much to be seen from the entrance of the lighthouse in this landward direction, save sand. Now about all Tobias could see was snow.

"Ahoy! Aho-o-oy the light!"

The cry was shattered against the singing gale. But the lightkeeper made out the direction from which it came and started down the road toward Lower Trillion. In the other direction were the summer residences of certain wealthy citizens on the Clay Head. While beyond lay Clinkerport at the head of the bay, the entrance to which the lighthouse guarded.

Tobias announced his coming by a hearty hail. He saw a muffled glow in the snow pall ahead. Then the outlines of a low-hung motor car that was quite evidently stalled in a drift.

"Hey!" he demanded. "What you doing in that contraption out in this storm? Ain't you got no sense?"

"Now don't *you* begin!" rejoined a complaining voice, and a rather stalky figure appeared in the half-shrouded radiance of the headlights. "I've been told already what I am and where I get off. It isn't my fault that blame thing got stalled."

"It is your fault that we came this way from Harbor Bar," interposed a very sweet but at present very sharp voice. ("Jest like cranberry sarse," Tobias secretly commented.) "We should not have taken the shore road."

"You didn't say so when we started," declared the tall young man, indignantly.

"I was not driving the car. You insisted on doing that," chimed the tart voice instantly.

"One would think you expected me to be omniscient."

"Well, you appear to be omnipresent—you are always in the way," and a much shorter figure, muffled in furs, and quite evidently that of a young woman, appeared beside the taller individual from the stalled car.

"And I cal'late, Heppy," Tobias explained, relating the event later to his sister, "that them two socdologers of words would have brought on a fist fight if I hadn't stepped into the breach, so to say, *and* the smaller of them castaways hadn't been a gal! Some day when I get time I'm going to look up 'omniscient' and 'omnipresent' in the dictionary. They sound like mighty mean words."

It was the lightkeeper's interference that saved further and more bitter words between the two stranded voyagers. Tobias got another look at the taller figure's face, and in spite of the pulled-down peak of his cap and the goggles he wore, recognized it.

"If 'tain't Ralph Endicott!" exclaimed the lightkeeper. "And who is that with you? *Not* Miss Lorna?"

"Oh, Mr. Bassett!" cried the young woman, stumbling toward him. "Take me to the light. I shall be *so* glad of its shelter. Is Miss Hephzibah at home?"

"She was when I left," said Tobias. "An' I cal'late she won't go gaddin' endurin' this gale. It don't show right good sense for anybody to be out such a night."

"That's what I tell him," the girl cried. "Anybody with sense——"

"You wanted to come over here and see what shape the house was in, Lorna Nicholet!" stormed Ralph Endicott. "I was only doing you a favor."

"Do you call this a favor?" demanded the girl.

"Anybody would think I brought this storm on purposely."

"You certainly tried to get through a road that you should have known would be drifted when it *did* begin to snow. Bah! Give me your arm, Mr. Bassett. He's the most useless——"

"Ain't no good *you* staying out here, Ralphie," advised the old lightkeeper. "Nobody will run off with that little buzz-cart of yourn. Heppy's got fish balls for supper—a whole raft of 'em."

The young man followed through the snow, grumbling. The prospect of a good meal, as Tobias later acknowledged, did not seem to influence a college man as it once might the long-legged harum-scarum boy who had raced these beaches for so many summers.

Endicott and Lorna Nicholet were of the sandpiper class. So Tobias usually referred to the summer visitors who fluttered about the sands for several months of each year. These young folks had been coming to Clay Head each season since they were in rompers. Lorna's aunt, Miss Ida Nicholet of Harbor Bar, and head of the family, owned the rambling old house overlooking the mouth of the bay. The Endicotts—"the Endicotts of Amperly," to distinguish them from numerous other groups of the same name whose habitat dot the sea-coast of Massachusetts—usually occupied one of the bungalows on Clay Head during the summer.

"See what the gale blowed in, Heppy," was the lightkeeper's announcement as he banged open the outer door.

His sister turned, frying-fork in hand, and peered through her spectacles at the snow-covered figures of the visitors. She was a comfortably built person, was Hephzibah Bassett, with rosy-brown, unwrinkled face, despite her unacknowledged age of fifty-odd. Her iron-gray hair was parted in the center and crinkled over her ears in tiny plaits, being caught in a small "bob" low on her plump neck behind. She never went to bed at night without braiding her hair on the side in several "pigtails" (to use her brother's unsavory expression) to be combed out into this wavy effect when she changed her house gown in the afternoon. It was a style of hair-dressing which, if old-fashioned, became her well.

There was something very wholesome and kindly appearing about Hephzibah Bassett. She might not possess the shrewdness of her brother, the lightkeeper, and she did nag a good bit. Yet spinsterhood had not withered her smile nor squeezed dry her fount of human kindness.

"For love's sake!" she cried now, when she had identified the petite figure shaking its furs free of the sticky snow. "If 'tain't Lorny Nicholet! Do come and

give me a kiss, Lorny. I can't leave these fishballs or they'd scorch."

The girl wriggled out of her coat and let it drop to the braided mat. She was just such a looking girl as one might expect from her name. There was French blood in the Nicholets. Lorna was distinctly of the brunette type, small limbed, as lithe as a feline. Perhaps that was why she could scratch! There were little short curls framing her broad, low forehead. The gloss of a crow's wing accentuated the blackness of her hair.

Her face glowed now from facing the storm—or was it from indignation? Her eyes sparkled so luminously that one could not be sure whether they were black or brown. She was one of those girls who seem all alive, all of the time. She had the alert appearance of a wild bird on the twig—ready for instant flight.

"Oh, how good it smells in here, Miss Heppy!" She fluttered across the big kitchen and imprinted upon the woman's cheek a warm kiss. She hugged, too, the ample arm that Heppy did not use in turning the fishballs in the deep frying kettle.

"You certain sure give us a surprise, Lorny," said the lightkeeper's sister.

"Of course I intended giving you a call as we passed," the girl said. "But I started for the special purpose of looking over the house for Aunt Ida and listing such new things as we shall need for the summer. *This* doesn't look much like summer, does it?"

"Oh, it's the last quintal of winter, I cal'late," said the woman, spearing a brown cake. "Lucky I made a mess of these. I didn't really expect any visitors to-night."

"That's just it, Miss Heppy! How will I ever get back to Harbor Bar to-night?"

"You won't. Why should you? Your aunt will know you are safe—with him."

Miss Heppy glanced slyly around at Ralph Endicott, whom she had but briefly greeted. The girl, seeing her glance, pouted.

"I wish you wouldn't!" she said in a low voice. "It fairly gets on my nerves. Everybody does it."

"Does what, child?" asked Miss Heppy, with surprise.

"Takes it for granted that Ralph Endicott and I are engaged."

"Wal—you be sort o' young, I suppose——"

"If I was forty I wouldn't be engaged to him!" flared up Lorna.

"For love's sake!" exclaimed the woman. "Don't say that. Though at forty you ought to've been married to him a good many years," and she broke into an unctuous chuckle that shook her ample bosom like jelly.

"I'll never marry him!" cried the girl, but under her breath.

"Now, now!" urged Miss Heppy. "You always be quarreling with Ralphie. But you know they're jest love spats. He's a good fellow——"

"You don't know what it means, Miss Heppy, to a girl to have a man just

forced on her. Everybody trying to make her take him, willy-nilly."

"Um-m. None warn't never forced on me," admitted the woman, dividing her attention between the frying fishballs and Lorna's affair of the heart. "But I reckon, Lorna, they couldn't force a better boy on you."

"That is one of the worst phases of it," declared the girl seriously. "There is not one single, solitary thing to be said against Ralph's character. Unless—well, there was a girl when he went to college. At least, so they say. But I suppose all boys must have their foolish puppy-love affairs," concluded Lorna, with an owllike appearance of wisdom that revealed the quite unsophisticated girl who believes she "knows it all."

Miss Heppy merely stared. In her secluded life love was *love*. There were no gradations known either as "puppy-love" or by other terms of rating.

"It isn't that Ralph isn't good enough, Miss Heppy," whispered the girl. "But he's been thrown at me all my life long!" She was not yet twenty-one. "I just *won't* marry him."

She stamped her foot on the hearth. Tobias, who had been leisurely taking off his storm coat and unbuckling the strap of his sou'wester as he talked cheerfully to the rather glum looking Ralph, now turned to the women.

"I feel some like stomping in my stall, too," was his comment upon Lorna's emphatic punctuation of her whispered defiance. "Bear a hand with the supper, Heppy. I've got to go up to the gallery again and clear the snow off the lamp. It surely does stick to-night. I was just getting the glass clear when I heard you young folks shouting for rescue.

"Come, Miss Lorna! Come, Ralph! Pull up cheers for yourselves. Supper's ready, I cal'late, ain't it, Heppy?"

CHAPTER II

CONFIDENCES

The blast struck the light tower so heavily that Ralph Endicott felt the whole structure vibrate as he followed Tobias up the spiral stairway after supper. In spite of the lightkeeper's jollity and Miss Heppy's kindness, the supper had seemed to hearten but little the spirits of the young man.

He had offered to attend Tobias in his duty at the top of the tower more for the purpose of getting away from the women than for any other reason. He

seized the broom and followed Tobias with the scraper out upon the open gallery. If the storm had seemed furious before supper, it had risen to a top gale now. The two men could scarcely face it on the windward side.

The gale came in blasts that slapped their burden of snow against the lighthouse with great force. Ralph was barely able to keep his feet. But the sturdy lightkeeper went about the task with a certain phlegm.

They managed to free the glass of its curtain of snow. Then Ralph staggered around to the sheltered gallery, on the heels of Tobias. The younger man's was a gloomy face when they once more entered the lamp room.

"Cheer up," said Tobias, getting his breath and eyeing Ralph aslant. "They tell me the worst is yet to come. Though I tell you fair, Ralphie, if the last end o' my life is anywhere as hard as what happened me when I shipped cabin boy on the old *Sarah Drinkwater*, the good Lord help me to bear it!

"Why, Ralphie, from the time she was warped out o' the dock at Provincetown till we unloaded them box shocks at Santiago I didn't git to git my clothes off—no, sir!

"We *did* have bad weather, I cal'late, though I never got out on deck often enough the whole endurin' v'y'ge to observe the sea and sky. I was washing dishes, making up berths, cleaning pots and pans, peeling 'taters and turmits, and seeding raisins for the skipper's plum duff most o' the time.

"Seeding raisins! Oh, sugar, I got to thinkin' that if that was all going to sea meant, I might better have got a job in a scullery and kept on an even footing. And I purty nigh got my lips in such a pucker whistling while I seeded them raisins (cookie wouldn't trust me otherwise) that I never did get 'em straight since.

"Say, lemme tell you!" proceeded Tobias, his weather-stained face beaming in the glow of the great Argand light. "Cap'n Drinkwater demanded his plum duff for supper ev'ry endurin' day of the v'y'ge, no matter what the weather was. He had an old black cook, Sam Snowball, that had got so's he could make that pudding to the queen's taste.

"Lemme tell you! The skipper was that stingy that he fed the crew rusty pork and weevilly beans, and a grade of salt horse that would make a crew of Skowegians mutiny. But the *Sarah Drinkwater* never made long enough v'y'ges for her crew to mutiny—no, sir!

"But that plum duff—oh, sugar! Bein' the boy, I never got more'n the lickin's of the dish. If I got enough 'taters and salt horse to fill my belly so's to keep my pants up, I was lucky. The skipper and the mate divided the duff between 'em.

"Ahem!" he added critically, "you don't look as though there was any plums at all in your duff, Ralph."

"There isn't," returned the young man shortly.

"Oh, sugar!" ejaculated the lightkeeper, drawing forth a short clay pipe and

a sack of cut tobacco. "I cal'late that you folks with money have more real troubles than what we poor folks do."

"Huh! *Money!*" scoffed Endicott.

"Yep. It's mighty poor bait for fish, I cal'late. You can't even chum with it."

"Money isn't everything," said the young man shrugging his shoulders.

"True. True as preaching," cried Tobias. "But 'twill buy most everything you're likely to need in this world. And you've got enough, Ralph, to keep you from getting gray-headed before your time worrying about where your three meals a day are coming from. I don't see what can be wrong with you. And that purty gal——"

"Now stop, Tobias Bassett!" exclaimed Endicott. "Don't keep reminding me of Lorna. I get enough of that at home."

"Wal!" gasped the lightkeeper. "For you to speak so of Lorna! Why, that's the main-skys'l-pole of the whole suit of spars—only needs the main-truck to cap it. What do you mean?"

"Now, mind you," Endicott said earnestly. "I haven't a thing to say against Lorna. She's a nice girl—for some other fellow. But I declare to you, Tobias, *I won't marry her.*"

"Oh, sugar!"

"Just because my Uncle Henry and her Aunt Ida have planned for us to do so since we were little tads running about the beaches here, is no reason why I should be tied up to Lorna forever and ever, Amen!"

"That's a mighty hard sayin'——"

"You think, like everybody else, that Lorna and I were made for each other. We weren't! We'd fight all the time. We always do fight. Look at to-night. The first little thing that goes wrong she jumps at me. I'm sick of playing dog and rolling over every time Lorna orders me to.

"And look at the mess we're in to-night!"

"What's the matter with you, boy?" demanded the lighthouse keeper. "You're under shelter. There's grub enough in the light to stave off starvation for a spell. Nothing can't happen to your buzz-cart worse than its being drifted under with snow."

"Oh, you don't understand, Tobias!" said the exasperated Ralph. "Our going off in my car the way we did, and not getting back to-night—why! it'll be all over Harbor Bar that we've eloped."

"I see," said the lightkeeper between puffs of his short pipe. Then: "You don't cal'late to marry Lorna?"

"I won't have her thrown at me."

"I never had no gal throwed at me," Tobias reflected. "I dunno how 'twould feel. But I will say that if I had to catch such a throw as Lorna Nicholet, I surely

wouldn't make a muff of it!"

"That's all right," observed Endicott. "I'm not saying she isn't a nice enough girl. But I don't believe she really wants me any more than I want her. In fact, I know there was another fellow last year that she was interested in. A chap named Conny Degger. He was in my class at college. Kind of a sport, but I guess he's all right, at that. But Lorna's Aunt Ida broke it up. Wouldn't let Conny shine around Lorna any more when she learned about it.

"They've got us both thrown and tied, Tobias! That's the way Uncle Henry, and Aunt Ida, and all the rest of my family and Lorna's people have got us fixed. They act as though we'd just got to marry each other. And after this mischance—breaking down here in the snow—they'll all say we're disgraced forever if we don't announce the engagement."

"Oh, sugar!" said the lightkeeper again, puffing away placidly.

In the kitchen Lorna Nicholet was making a confidante of Miss Heppy quite as Ralph had trusted Tobias. Nor was the girl less determined to thwart the intention of her family in this matrimonial affair, than was Ralph in his attitude toward his relatives.

"For love's sake!" murmured the lightkeeper's sister, realizing at last how much in earnest the girl was, "Miss Ida'll near about have a conniption. She's set her heart on you an' Ralph marrying, for years."

"And his Uncle Henry is just as foolish," sighed Lorna, wiping her eyes. "Why will old people never have sense enough to let young people's affairs alone?"

"Well, now, as you might say," Miss Heppy observed, "Miss Ida and Henry Endicott ain't re'lly old. Forty-odd ain't what ye might call aged—not in a way of speaking. But I cal'late they are some sot in their ways."

"'Some sot' is right, Miss Heppy," repeated Lorna, suddenly giggling and her vivid face a-smile once more. "In her own case Aunt Ida is a misogamist; yet she urges marriage on me. And Ralph's Uncle Henry is a misogynist in any case. Why he is so anxious to force Ralph into the wedded state I do not see."

"Seems to me them air purty hard names to call your aunt and Henry Endicott," murmured Miss Heppy.

"Oh!" Lorna laughed again. "They just mean that Aunt Ida hates marriage and Uncle Henry hates women."

Miss Heppy waggled a doubtful head.

"They wasn't like that when I first remember them, Lorny," she said. "Miss Ida Nicholet is a fine looking woman now. She was a pretty sight for anybody's eyes when she was your age, or thereabout."

"I know she was quite a belle when she was young," Lorna agreed, rather carelessly.

"And Henry Endicott wasn't any—what did you call him jest now?"

"A misogynist—a hater of women."

"He didn't hate 'em none when he come here that first summer," said Miss Heppy, with a reflective smile. "He was a young professor at some college then. I expect he didn't know as much about inventing things then as what he does now. But he knowed more how to please women. He pleased your Aunt Ida right well, I cal'late."

"Never! You don't mean it, Miss Heppy!" exclaimed Lorna, sensing a romance.

"Yes, I thought then Miss Ida and Henry Endicott would make a match of it. But somehow—well, such things don't always go the way you expect them to. Both your aunt and Professor Endicott were high-strung—same's you and Ralph be, Lorny."

"Why," cried the girl smiling again, "I'd never fight with Ralph at all if they didn't try to make us marry. I wonder if it is so, that Aunt Ida and Ralph's uncle were once fond of each other! If they could not make a match of it, why are they so determined to force Ralph and me into a marriage?"

"Mebbe because they see their mistake," Miss Heppy said judiciously. "I don't believe your aunt and Henry Endicott have been any too happy endurin' these past twenty-odd years."

"Tell me!" urged the girl, her cheeks aglow and her eyes dancing. "Is remaining single all your life such a *great* cross, Miss Heppy? Are there not some compensations?"

The woman looked up from darning the big blue wool sock that could have fitted none but her brother's foot. The smile with which she favored the girl had much tenderness as well as retrospection in it.

"I don't believe that any woman over thirty is ever single from choice, Lorny. She may never find the man she wants to marry. Or something separates her from the one she is sure-'nough fitted to mate with. So, she must make the best of it."

"But *you*, Miss Heppy?" asked Lorna, boldly. "Why didn't you ever marry?"

"Why—I *was* cal'lating on doing so, when I was a gal," said the woman gently. "Listen!"

The girl, startled, looked all about the room and then back into Miss Heppy's softly smiling face.

"Do you hear it, Lorny? The sea a-roaring over the reef and the wind wailing about the light? That's my answer to your question. I seen so many women in my young days left lone and lorn because of that sea. Ah, my deary, 'tain't the men that go down to the sea in ships that suffer most. 'Tis their wives and mothers, and the little children they leave behind.

"When I was a young gal I never had a chance to meet ary men but them that airned their bread on the deep waters. My father was drowned off Hatteras,

two brothers older than Tobias were of the crew of the windjammer, *Seahawk*. She never got around the Horn on her last v'y'ge. In seventeen homes about Clinkerport and Twin Rocks, the women mourned their dead on the *Seahawk*.

"No, no. I didn't stay single from choice. But I shut my ears and eyes to ary man that heard the call of the sea. And I never met no other, Lorny."

The uproar of the storm was an accompaniment to Miss Heppy's story. The solemnity of it quenched any further expression of what Lorna Nicholet considered her troubles. Within the kitchen there was silence for a space.

CHAPTER III

THE APEX OF THE STORM

Bedtime came, and Miss Heppy led Lorna, with the little whale oil hand lamp, up one flight of the spiral stairway and ushered her into the best bedroom. It was the whitewashed cell facing the ocean.

The waves boomed with sullen roar upon the rocks, breaking, it seemed, almost at the base of the lighthouse. Spray, as well as the sleet, dashed against the single unshuttered window. It was sheeted with white. But Miss Heppy drew the curtains close.

"You won't be afraid to sleep here alone, will you, child?" asked the lightkeeper's sister. "Tobias and I are only just across the landing. Though I guess Tobias will be up most o' the night watchin' the lamp, and he'll likely put your young man in his bed."

"I wish you wouldn't!" sighed Lorna. "He's not my young man, whatever else he may be. I here and now disown all part and parcel in Ralph Endicott."

"I dunno what Miss Ida will say," the woman observed mournfully. "It'll be a shock to her. Wal, try to sleep, deary, if the wintry winds do blow. I guess 'twill clear, come morning. These late winter storms never last."

She had shaken out a voluminous canton-flannel nightgown which she laid over the foot of the bed. Now she pricked up the two round wicks of the lamp with a pin, and after kissing the visitor left her to seek repose.

She heard a heavy step on the stair as she reached the foot of it, so held the kitchen door open for her brother. Tobias had left Ralph to watch the lamp while he came down on some small errand. Finding his sister alone, the lightkeeper lingered.

"I give it as my opinion, Heppy," he said, slowly puffing on his clay pipe, "that it was lucky we was born handsome instead o' rich."

"You speak for yourself, Tobias," rejoined his sister, with good-natured irony. "My beauty never struck in, so's to be chronic, as ye might say. And I could do right now with lots more money than we've got."

"You'd only put it in the Clinkerport Bank—you know you would," chuckled Tobias. "And the most useless dollar in the world—to the owner I mean—is a dollar in the bank."

"You never did properly appreciate money."

"No, thanks be! Not according to your standard of appreciation, Heppy. Money is only good for what you spend it for. A dollar in the bank that airns ye three cents a year ain't even worth thinkin' of—let alone talking about. You might just as well hide it under the hearthstone. It would be less worry."

"We ain't got enough in the Clinkerport Bank to worry you none," scoffed his sister.

"I dunno. Arad Thompson, the president of the bank *might* run off with the funds. Such things do happen."

"And he confined to a wheel chair for ten years now!" ejaculated Miss Heppy. "I shall never worry over our little tad of money—save that it is so little."

"I give it as my opinion that money don't seem to do folks all the good in the world that it oughter. Look at these two young ones, now, Lorna and Ralph. Their folks has got more wealth than enough. And yet Ralph croaks as though he saw no chance at all ahead of him but trouble."

"I do allow," admitted Miss Heppy, "that Lorna thinks as little of Ralph's money as she seems to of the boy himself. And he's a nice boy."

"And she's just the nicest gal that ever stepped in shoe-leather," rejoined the lightkeeper stoutly.

"They don't 'preciate each other," sighed Miss Heppy.

"Ain't it so? I give it as my opinion that if they was poor—re'l poor—they would fall in love with each other quick enough."

"I dunno——"

"*I do,*" declared the confident lightkeeper. "It's a case o' money being no good at all to them young ones. If Ralph had to dig clams or clerk it in a bank for a living, and Lorny didn't have more'n two caliker dresses a year and could not get any more—why! them two would fall in love with each other so hard 'twould hurt. That's my opinion, Heppy, and I give it for what it's worth."

He knocked the heeltap out of his pipe on the stove hearth. His sister was not giving him her full attention. She raised her eyes from her darning and listened to the storm.

The wind shrieked like a company of fiends around the tall tower. The sleet and spray slapped viciously against the shutterless windows on the exposed side of the structure. The woman shook her head.

"It's a terrible night, Tobias. Listen!"

From the ocean rose the voice of a blast seemingly worse than any that had gone before. It was the apex of the storm. It drowned anything further Tobias might have said.

The hurricane from the sea took the light tower in its arms and shook it. The roar of it made the woman's face blanch.

As the sound poured away into the distance the two in the kitchen heard a crash of glass—then a scream. Tobias dashed for the stairway door.

"The lamp!" he shouted.

"That ain't no lamp, Tobias," declared his sister.

When he opened the door a gale rushed in and sucked the flame out of the top of the lamp chimney with a "plop!" The stairway seemed filled with a whirling cyclone of wintry air.

Tobias heard the clatter of Ralph Endicott's boots on the iron treads coming down from above. A door was banging madly on the second floor. Lorna screamed again.

"The window of the best room's burst in, Tobias," shouted Miss Heppy. "That poor child!"

The lightkeeper had seized his lantern, and now he started up the stairway. But youth was quicker than vigorous old age. Ralph plunged into the bedchamber, the door of which had been burst open by the blast from the wrecked window.

The cowering figure of the girl at the foot of the bed, wrapped in Miss Heppy's voluminous nightgown, was visible in the whirlwind of snow. She sprang toward Ralph with a cry of relief, and the young man gathered her into his arms as though she were a child.

"Oh, Ralph!"

"All right, Lorna! You're safe enough. Don't be frightened," soothed Endicott.

For a long moment he sheltered her thus, bulwarking his own body between her and the blast from the window. She cowered in his arms. Then:

"For love's sake!" gasped Miss Heppy at the head of the stairs.

The lantern in her brother's hand broadly illumined the two young people. Tobias himself was enormously amused.

"Don't look as though you hated each other none to speak of," was his tactless comment.

"Tobias!" shrieked Miss Heppy.

Lorna struggled out of Ralph's arms in a flame of rage.

"How dare you, Ralph Endicott?" she cried. "I thought you were at least a gentleman. You go right away from here—now—this minute! I'll never speak to you again!"

"Why, I—I——"

Ralph was too startled for the moment to be angry. The girl ran in her bare feet to the comfort of Miss Heppy's ample person.

"Take me somewhere! Take me to your room, Miss Heppy. I never want to see him again. How dared he?"

"Oh, sugar!" murmured the perfectly amazed lightkeeper.

But the fires of rage began to glow within Ralph Endicott's bosom now, blown by the blast of Lorna's ingratitude. His face blazed.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "I did not come here because I wanted to. You yelled loud enough for help. I—I——"

"That will do!" exclaimed Lorna, her head up, as regal as any angry little queen could be. "If you were a gentleman by nature you would have refused to stay here in the first place, when you knew the light was my only shelter."

"Well, of all the——"

"You can go on to Clinkerport. Telephone from the hotel to Aunt Ida and tell her where I am and whose care I am in. If the story that you and I remained here all night together is circulated about Harbor Bar, I'll never forgive you, Ralph Endicott!"

"Great Scott!" shouted the young man, coming out into the hall and closing the door of the bedroom. "You don't suppose for a moment *I* want such a story circulated among our friends, do you? No fear!"

He started down the stairs, pulling his cap over his ears and buttoning his automobile coat up to his throat.

"For love's sake!" again gasped the troubled spinster, who still held the girl in her arms.

"Hold on! Hold on!" exclaimed Tobias. "'Tain't fit for to turn a dog out into this storm."

"I don't care!" cried the hysterical girl wildly. "He never should have let the car stall in that snowdrift. He should have gone on to Clinkerport alone instead of making a nuisance of himself around here."

The lower door banged as punctuation to her speech.

Tobias started to descend the stair. His sister motioned him commandingly toward the door of the best room.

"You find some way to stopper that window, Tobias," she said, "and then go back to your lamp. You can't do no good interfering in this."

She led the sobbing girl into her own room and closed the door. The lightkeeper shook his head.

"I give it as my opinion," he muttered, "that women folks is as hard to understand as the Chinee language. And they begin their finicking mighty airly."

Lorna sobbed herself into quietness in Miss Heppy's feather bed, cuddled into the good spinster's embrace. The latter did not speak one word of criticism. But as her passion ebbed, Lorna's conscience pricked her sorely. She only appeared to fall asleep. In truth she remained very wide awake listening to the bellowing of the gale.

Suppose something should happen to Ralph out in the storm? It was hours, it seemed to her, before the wind calmed at all. She visualized her friend staggering along the road toward Clinkerport, back of the Clay Head cottages that were all empty at this time of year. Suppose he was overcome by the storm, and fell there, and was drifted over by the snow?

She lay and trembled at these thoughts; but she would not have admitted for the world that she cared!

After all, Ralph had been her playmate for years. Why, she could not remember when Ralph was not hanging upon the outskirts of the Nicholet family. He was as omnipresent, as she had told him, as Aunt Ida. And Miss Ida Nicholet had ever been Lorna's guardian.

The girl was the youngest of a goodly number of brothers and sisters; but her mother, Mr. Nicholet's second wife, had died at Lorna's birth. Miss Ida had come into the big house at Harbor Bar at that time and assumed entire control—at least of Lorna.

The other girls and boys had grown up and flown the nest. Mr. Nicholet was a busy man of studious habits who, if the housemaid had come into his library, kissed him on his bald crown, and asked him for twenty dollars, would have produced the money without question, said, "Yes, my child," and considered that he had done his duty by his youngest daughter.

Lorna had often passed him on the street and he had not known her.

But Mr. Nicholet subscribed to everything Miss Ida, his energetic sister, said. If she declared it was the right thing for Lorna to marry Ralph Endicott—that ended the matter as far as Mr. Nicholet was concerned. Lorna knew it to be quite useless to appeal to him.

By and by it began to rain—torrentially. This, following the snow which had drifted so heavily during the evening, somewhat relieved Lorna's anxiety. The rain would flood the roads and make them impassable, even if Ralph could repair his car; but no wanderer on foot would be drifted over by rain.

She heard Tobias go down and up the spiral staircase more than once. He even went out of the lighthouse on one occasion. That was soon after Ralph had gone and while the storm was still high. But the lightkeeper had quickly returned.

Dawn came at last, clutching at the window with wan fingers. The pale

light grew slowly. Lorna heard Tobias rattling the stove-hole covers as he built the kitchen fire. Then the odor of coffee reached her nostrils, and Miss Heppy awoke.

CHAPTER IV

PROPHECIES

Lorna appeared in the lighthouse kitchen with red eyelids and the bruised look about her eyes that usually advertises the lack of sleep in the case of all dark-eyed people. But she smiled and thanked Miss Heppy and Tobias briskly for their kindness.

"I am sure I do not know what I should have done if you had not taken me in. Did the storm do much damage in your best chamber, Miss Heppy?"

"I ain't had time to see, child," replied the spinster. "Tobias will have to get a new winder frame, I cal'late. You got it boarded up tight, Tobias?"

"Tight's the word," her brother assured her.

"I hope nothing has happened to our house on Clay Head," Lorna said.

"Not likely. Them storm shutters and doors Miss Ida insisted on putting on are a good thing, I allow," the lightkeeper observed.

"We'd ought to have outside blinds to our lower windows," his sister complained. "But the Government don't think so."

"Now, don't let's get onto politics," said Tobias, his eyes twinkling. "Ye know, Lorny, Heppy and me votes dif'rent tickets, and jest at present she's ag'in the Government."

"Oh, you hush!" said Miss Heppy, as Lorna's laugh chimed in unison with Tobias's mellow chuckle.

"Is it going to clear, Mr. Bassett?" the girl asked.

"I guess likely. Ain't been but one storm so fur that didn't clear. And that's this one. But I give it as my opinion that it was a bad night. Bad," he added, cocking an eye at Lorna, "for anybody who had to be out in it."

"Now, Tobias!" ejaculated his sister.

"Them on shipboard, I mean, o' course," the lightkeeper hastened to say.

Lorna ignored this byplay. She would not reveal in any case that she had felt anxiety for Ralph. She would only show interest in the condition of the Nicholet house on the bluff, and after breakfast she bundled up against the cutting gale that

still blew, and ventured to journey cross-lots to the summer residences.

The road, as Lorna had supposed, was badly washed by the rain where it was not drifted with mushy snow. She wore Miss Heppy's overshoes and waded ankle deep in slush as she crossed the barrens toward the steep ascent of the Clay Head. At the foot of this bluff she struck into the patrol-path—that well-defined trail made by the surfmen who patrol every yard of the outer Cape Cod coast, from the Big End at the tip near Provincetown, down to Monomoy Point south of Chatham.

It was slippery under foot, and the wind was still strong. The clouds were breaking, however, and Lorna could see clear across the wide-mouthed bay. She observed a gleam of light reflected from the cupola of the life-saving station at Upper Trillion. A steam tug towing a brick barge, that had run into Clinkerport ahead of the storm, was now breasting the after-swell, putting out to sea.

The Nicholet house was the first in the row of summer houses which overhung the beach toward Clinkerport. Lorna was sheltered from the wind when she approached the side door to which she had the key.

As she mounted the steps she noted with surprise that one of the cellar windows right at hand was uncovered. The plank shutter lay upon the snow, and there were marks about the window that might have been made by somebody entering the house.

"And such a night as last night was," murmured the amazed girl. "I can scarcely believe there was a thief here."

Indeed, marauders of any character were seldom a menace upon the Cape. The summer people who occupied the houses along Clay Head merely locked their doors in winter and left them until the next season without fear of trespassers.

Lorna slowly fitted the key in the lock and opened the door. She entered softly. Could it be possible that an intruder was now in the house?

At the left of this side entry was a small sitting-room. When the outer door was closed she distinctly felt a warm current of air from between the draperies that had been left hanging in the sitting-room doorway.

Amazed, she stepped hurriedly forward and held aside the curtain to look in. There was a smouldering fire in the grate. Lying outstretched upon the floor, with a rug wrapped about him, was a man. He was asleep, and for the moment Lorna could not see his face, nor did she imagine who he could be.

She tiptoed around the table, and then she saw the sleeper's flaxen head. Suddenly he started, rolled over, and sat up. He opened sleep-clouded eyes.

"Is—is that you, Lorna?" he yawned.

The girl's face flamed and her eyes fairly sparked with wrath. She made a futile gesture with both hands as she backed away from Ralph Endicott.

"Oh, you—you——"

She could not articulate her disgust. Of all the perfectly useless fellows she had ever heard of, Ralph took the palm!

Without uttering another word the girl left the room and the house. Ralph had managed to spoil everything, after all. He had not gone to Clinkerport and telephoned to Harbor Bar. The tongue of scandal would not be stilled as she had hoped it might. And Lorna Nicholet considered it quite scandalous for her friends to believe that she and Ralph Endicott were "as good as engaged."

"I'll never forgive him! I'll never forgive him!" she cried over and over, as she tramped back to the light.

She made no comment then to either Miss Heppy or Tobias about what she had found at the house. She did not even notice the old lightkeeper's sly glances. He had followed Ralph's footprints by lantern-light in the storm the night before and knew where the young man had taken shelter after being driven from the lighthouse by Lorna's sharp tongue.

Endicott did not appear that day at the Twin Rocks Light. But he must have gone on to Clinkerport after Lorna's unexpected visit to the house on Clay Head aroused him, for the next day—the shell road having become passable again for motor cars—he came out with a truck from the garage to tow his roadster into town.

"You can go back with the garage man and me, and I will hire a car to take you home to Harbor Bar to-night," Endicott said sullenly enough, to Lorna.

"I will go to Clinkerport with the garage man," the girl promptly rejoined. "But you need not bother about me after I arrive there. I can manage to get home by myself. The trains are running."

"Well, I telephoned your Aunt Ida I would bring you home," he said gloomily. "They—they were some stirred up about us."

"They need be stirred up no further about us. I tell you I have got through with you, Ralph Endicott—for good and all! I will not be forced by my family to endure your company."

"It's fifty-fifty," he rejoined. "You don't have to ride any high horse about it. I'm no more pleased with the prospect of catering to your whims, I assure you."

"You are no gentleman!" she declared, her little fists clenched.

"At least, I am telling you the truth, Lorna," he said grimly. "Perhaps being a gentleman precludes one's being candid."

"Oh—you!" she ejaculated again and turned her back on him.

Tobias watched them depart with puckered face. Separately the young folk had shaken hands with the lightkeeper and his sister, and thanked them warmly for their hospitality. But when the two cars started Lorna sat up stiffly, "eyes front," beside the garage man and would not look back for fear of seeing Ralph Endicott in the rear car.

"Just as friendly to each other as a couple o' strange dogs," observed Tobias. "She's on her ear, sure enough. And Ralphie is just as stuffy as they make 'em. What do you reckon will come of it, Heppy?"

"I know one thing, Tobias, and that ain't two," declared his sister flatly. "None o' your interference is goin' to help matters. Don't you think it."

"Wal—now—I dunno. If I can help a likely couple like Lorna and Ralph to an understanding——"

"Huh! Matches are made in heaven," said his sister.

"Oh, sugar! They don't often smell so when you light 'em," chuckled Tobias.

"Oh, you hush!"

"I'm thinkin' serious, Heppy, of helping them two foolish young ones to an understanding."

"You'd better mind your own business, Tobias Bassett."

"Ain't it my business?" he queried, his head cocked on one side watching the disappearing motor cars. "You know the Bible says we should all turn to an' help get our neighbor's ass out o' the pit——"

"An' you'll be the biggest jack of all if you interfere in the affairs of them young ones."

"I dunno——"

"You'd better know!" exclaimed Miss Heppy, exasperated. "For love's sake! who ever told you, Tobias Bassett, that you knowed enough to venture where even angels fear to tread?"

"Oh! Hum! Then I guess you don't cal'late after all that matches is made in heaven," he chuckled. "And I give it as my opinion, Heppy, that marrying and giving in marriage ain't never been angels' jobs. Mebbe a mere human being like me might have more of a sleight at matchmaking than the heavenly host—if anybody should drive up an' ax ye."

CHAPTER V

THE UNEXPECTED

Miss Heppy took pride in her front yard. The immediate vicinity of a lighthouse is not often a beauty-spot, and that of the Twin Rocks Light was for the most part bleached sand. Nevertheless the lightkeeper's sister never failed to make her garden in early May.

The soil in which she coaxed to cheerful bloom old maid's pinks, bachelor buttons, ladies' slippers, marigolds and a dozen other old-fashioned flowers, was brought from a distance. The boisterous autumn winds always drifted over the beds with sand; yet each spring Miss Heppy, like nature herself, made all things new again.

"I vum!" said her brother in his good-natured, if critical way, "I don't see why you do it. All you have to begin on every year is the conch-shells and white pebbles for borders. Sea sand mixed with its loam in such quantity would ha' sp'iled the Garden of Eden for any agricultooral purposes."

"This ain't no Garden of Eden, I do allow," his sister said. "Wherever them scientific fellers undertake to locate what was mankind's first home, they never say 'twas here on the Cape."

"Oh, sugar!" chuckled Tobias. "It took them frozen-faced Puritan ancestors of our'n to choose the Cape to locate on an' set the Provincetown folks and the Plymouth folks a-fightin' over which town should be celebrated in song an' story as the real landin' place of the Pilgrim Fathers."

"Humph!" sniffed Hephzibah, "we hear enough about the Pilgrim Fathers. I cal'late if it hadn't been for the Pilgrim Mothers there wouldn't have been any settlement here a-tall."

"Ye-as," agreed Tobias, pursing his lips. "But the women didn't have the vote then, so they didn't get advertised none to speak of. Of course, there was Priscilla Alden—she that was a Mullens. Longfeller advertised *her* a good bit. She's the only woman among the Pilgrims that we hear much about. I cal'late 'twas because she was one that knowed her own mind."

"No," said his sister, whose habit of looking at the darker side of life could not be denied. "No. The first woman the history of them times tells about was drowned off the *Mayflower* as she lay in Provincetown Harbor."

"Oh, sugar! That's so," chuckled Tobias. "She was crowded overboard by the deckload of furniture the packet carried. I never did understand how such a small craft could have brought across all that household stuff folks claim was in her cargo."

But Miss Heppy's reflections were not to be turned by frivolity.

"She," the spinster said, with a sigh, "was the first of us Cape Cod women to suffer from the savage sea."

"Oh, sugar, Heppy!" ejaculated Tobias. "You're the beatin'est for seining up trouble and seeing the blackest side of things. Enough to give a man the fantods, you are! Hello! Here's the mail packet heaving into sight."

A bony horse with a head so long that he might easily eat his oats out of a flour barrel, appeared from around the turn in the Lower Trillion road. He drew behind him a buckboard which sagged under the weight of Amos Pickering, the

rural mail carrier.

"Maybe he's got a letter for us," suggested Miss Heppy with some eagerness. "You go see, Tobias."

The lightkeeper dropped his spade and made a speaking trumpet of his hands. "Ahoy! Ahoy, Amos! What's the good word?"

The mail carrier waved an answering hand before diving into the sack at his feet and bringing to light, as Tobias strode down to the roadside, a letter and a paper.

"Wal, now," said the lightkeeper, "that's what ye might call a heavy haul for us. I cal'late, Amos, if all your customers got as few parcels o' mail as what me and Heppy does, you'd purt' near go out o' business."

"It's got a black border onto it, Tobias," said the mail carrier, voicing the curiosity that ate like acid on his mind. "And it's postmarked at Batten. Ain't that where your Uncle Jethro lives?"

"Sure enough!" agreed the lightkeeper. "But 'tain't his hand o' write—nossir!"

"Be you sure?"

"Surest thing you know, Amos. 'Cause why? Cap'n Jethro Potts never learned to more than make his mark—if that much."

"I cal'late he's dead, Tobias."

"Then it's sartain he didn't send this letter with the black border."

"Well, it must be something about him, don't you think?" suggested the mail carrier leaning forward, his eager eyes twinkling.

"Why, we ain't in correspondence with nobody down there to Batten," said Tobias slowly, and holding the letter far off as though he feared it might explode.

Miss Heppy had got to her feet now and came forward.

"What's the matter with you, Tobias?" she cried. "Why don't you open it? Amos won't get home to-night if you don't."

Her gentle sarcasm was quite lost on the two men. Her brother shook his head.

"Can't open it," he said.

"Why not, for love's sake?" demanded the exasperated Heppy.

"'Cause it's for you," chuckled Tobias, thrusting the letter into her hand.

"For love's sake!" repeated Miss Heppy much flustered. "I can't read it, Tobias. I ain't got my specs here."

"No more have I," her brother rejoined. "But I cal'late I can read it for you if 'tain't writ in Choctaw."

The others, Amos no less than Heppy, remained eagerly expectant while Tobias worked his stubbed finger under the gummed flap of the envelope and tore it open. The folded sheet of paper he drew forth was likewise bordered with black. He held it off, for he was far-sighted, and read aloud slowly:

"'Batten, Mass.

] "'Twin Rocks Light.

"'Dear Miss Heppy:—

"'Your uncle, Captain Jethro Potts, of this town, passed into rest this day at noon. The funeral is set for Thursday at ten in the morning, that being high tide. You and your family is hereby notified and are requested to be present at the unsealing of Captain Potts' will in Judge Waddams' office which will follow the ceremony at the grave.

] "'ICIVILLA POTTS.'"

Then followed the date. The reading of the letter for the moment left the trio—even the mail carrier—stunned. The latter finally said:

"Well! Well! That's sad news—'tis, for a fact. I expect he left a tidy bit of money?"

"Poor Uncle Jethro!" murmured Miss Heppy.

"I don't know how much money Uncle Jethro had to leave," said Tobias slowly. "But however much or little 'twas, he left it all. That's sure."

Amos gathered up the reins.

"Course you'll both go down to the funeral?"

"'Tain't likely," Tobias said. "Somebody's got to stay and nuss this light, and I cal'late 'twill be me."

But Miss Heppy would not hear to that. She declared it to be her brother's duty to go and represent their branch of the family. To tell the truth, Miss Heppy had never in her life been farther from Clinkerport than to the East Harwich Fair, while Tobias was, of course, like all deep-bottom sailors, "a traveled man."

Came Thursday, and Zeke Bassett arrived with his motor car to take Tobias to the train. It was rather an early hour for a man to climb into his Sunday suit, and the lightkeeper hated formal dress.

He should have been well used to the black suit by this time. It had served him for state occasions for full twenty years. When it was bought Tobias had not been so full-bodied as he was now. He was a sturdy man, built brickwise, with more corners than curves, and the black short-tailed coat strained at each and every seam to keep him within its bounds.

To have buttoned it across his chest would have rent button from fabric. It was so tight at the armholes that his elbows were held from his sides and his shoulders squared in a most military fashion. Tight as the coat was at these points, there were three sets of wrinkles plainly evident at the back—two perpendicular

and one set horizontal. Altogether this ensemble of dress gave one the impression of a rather bulgy man being slowly choked to death by his own habit.

"I don't mind wearin' 'em on the Sabbath," confessed Tobias. "To keep in a proper frame of mind to enjoy one of Elder Hardraven's sermons, who's as melancholy as a widder woman with six small children, a feller needs to have something wearing on his mind b'sides his hair. It makes me right religious feeling to put on Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes."

"For love's sake!" his sister said tartly, "you're going to a funeral. I should think you would expect to feel religious."

"If I do," rejoined Tobias grimly, "me and the minister will be 'bout the only ones there that feel that way. This here is going to be a gathering of the vultures, Heppy."

"Why, Tobias, how you do talk!"

"Yep. The Pottses and their rel'tives are going to gather from far and near to hear the reading of Uncle Jethro's will. Icivilly Potts would never have writ us if Judge Waddams hadn't told her to. The Pottses of Batten would like to make the fun'ral and reading of the will a close-corporation affair, I cal'late. But 'tis evident Uncle Jethro must have mentioned others in his last will and testament."

"Oh, Tobias!" gasped his sister, clasping her hands.

"Yep," he rejoined. "If the old captain left us something, you'll be getting your wish, won't you?"

"Oh, don't Tobias!" she cried. "That sounds awful!"

"Oh, sugar!" drawled the practical lightkeeper, "we might's well own to it. We never bothered Uncle Jethro none endurin' his life. He was here and took pot-luck with us many's the time. He did seem to like your fishballs an' biscuit, Heppy. If he hadn't had prop'ty to watch down there at Batten, I cal'late he might nigh have lived here all the time. So why shouldn't we have expectations?"

"Oh, Tobias!" she murmured.

"I am frank to say," the lightkeeper declared, "that I'm going down there to Batten with expectations. Uncle Jethro is dead, and I cal'late to show respect to his memory. If the sermon is long I'll likely go to sleep during it. But I don't cal'late to sleep none in Judge Waddams' office when the will is being read."

His perfectly frank acknowledgment shocked Miss Heppy. But that was Tobias Bassett's way. He gave no hostage to Mrs. Grundy in any particular. No odor of hypocrisy clung to anything he did or said. If he had ever occasion to be untruthful he lied "straight from the shoulder"—without any circumlocution.

In his Sunday clothes, however, Tobias o' Twin Rocks Light was not likely to go to sleep under the dreariest funeral sermon that was ever preached on the Cape. The embrace of the Iron Virgin of the Inquisition could have been little more uncomfortable than that of his Sunday suit.

The Mariners' Chapel at Batten was set upon one of the loneliest sites to be found along the entire length of the Cape's ocean shore. Weather-bleached dunes and flats on which sparse herbage grew surrounded the chapel. But the building was centrally located and tapped a good-sized community. The gulls clamored about its squat bell-tower and the marching sands drifted against its foundation. The northeasterly windows which overlooked the sea were ground by the flying sand to a pebbly roughness. The high roof beams were hand-hewn, for the chapel had weathered at least four-score years. The pews were high-backed pens with doors. The old-time worshipper in the Puritan House of God preferred to be shut in from his neighbors, and he likewise kept his religion a matter of close communion. The uncushioned seats were the most uncomfortable that the ingenuity of man could devise.

There had been no service at the house. Such a thing as a private funeral was not known in this community. A funeral is one of the most important incidents in the existence of Cape Cod folks, and at Batten (which was a clam-digging village) was held at high sea. It was expected of the minister that he should preach a full and complete sermon over the remains.

The bustling old undertaker, in shabby black broadcloth and with his iron-grey hair brushed forward over his ears, giving him the look of a super-serious monkey, marshaled the audience after the sermon to march down one aisle past the coffin and out the other aisle.

The grim, mahogany-hued face of Captain Jethro Potts, the lines of which even the touch of death could not soften, confronted his neighbors from the coffin. His countenance was not composed as the dead usually are; but looked as though he lay there in ambush, ready to jump out at one. There was even the glitter of a beady eyeball behind the thin lashes drawn down over his eye.

"He looks mighty like he was a-watchin' of ye," observed the undertaker to Tobias. "I never see a corp' more nateral."

"You said it. 'Nateral' is right," agreed the lightkeeper. "I cal'late Uncle Jethro has got something to spring on his rel'tives. He's watchin' of 'em yet."

Whether the other members of the family had the same feeling about the dead man's alertness or not, they saw the lid of the coffin screwed down with complacency. Tobias was one of those who bore the coffin out to the churchyard and lowered it into the newly opened grave, the sides of which had to be bulkheaded to keep the sand from caving in.

Following the prayer there was a little lingering in the graveyard. Judge Waddams had announced that he would read the dead man's will in his office an hour later. Those interested began drifting back to the village along the white

shell road.

CHAPTER VI

DEAD MEN'S SHOES

A dozen or more grim-faced men and women were gathered in the lawyer's office when Tobias Bassett entered. He had seen them all at the church and grave, but there had been no opportunity to greet personally the Pottses, the Bassetts and the Dawsons, names which for the most part made up the roster of Captain Jethro's immediate family.

The lightkeeper proceeded to speak to each in turn. He was of no grim disposition himself, and was sport enough in any case to shake hands with his deadliest enemy before the battle.

His smile and cheerful word were for all, even for Icivilla Potts who was, of all the dead captain's relatives, the one who considered that Tobias's interest in the will should be infinitesimal. She had lived next door to Captain Jethro's little box of a house for thirty years, and had kept a sharp and hungry eye upon him and his affairs during all of that time.

"Yes," she was saying, "he depended upon me for everything. If Cap'n Jethro had been my own father I could have taken no more pains with him."

"I don't doubt it! I don't doubt it!" put in Mrs. Andrew Dawson, as sharp as any sparrow. "Cap'n Jethro told me that you'd interfered with everything you could, the whole endurin' time. He said, the Cap'n did, that you'd change the sun and moon, let alone the stars, in their courses, if so be you could!"

"Haw! Haw!" chortled Isaac Bassett, a bewhiskered old man whose bleary eyes and empurpled nose told the tale of much secret tippling. "Le's speak right out in meetin' and tell all we know. Who'll be the first of you women to tell how ye fished ter get the old Cap'n ter come and live with ye?"

"Why, Ike Bassett! How you talk!" was the chorus of denial.

"'Tis so," chuckled Isaac. "Jethro told me once that purt' nigh every woman that was any kin to him—and some that warn't—had offered to make a home for him. Come to think of it, though," he added, turning a bleary eye on Tobias, "there was one he said that hadn't bothered him none that-a-way. How is your sister Heppy, Tobe?"

"Wal, she ain't no younger," said the lightkeeper, cheerfully. "Otherwise she

is spry."

Judge Waddams entered at this point, before the tide of family acrimony could rise higher. He was a soft-stepping, palm-rubbing man, with a bald crown and iron-grey burnsides. His clean-lipped mouth was a slit no wider than the opening of his hip pocket. Yet he was not an unsympathetic man, as his mild brown eyes betrayed.

"Well, friends, we are gathered here on an occasion that I had hoped might be put off for a score of years yet. But Cap'n Jethro broke up fast during the past year, as such men as he often do. When their old hulks strike the rocks of age they go to pieces quickly.

"But Cap'n Jethro took time by the forelock and made all his property arrangements in good season. He converted everything into cash—even to the house he lived in to the last—and to settle his estate is going to be a very easy matter.

"Are we all here?" proceeded Judge Waddams, looking slowly about the room. His gaze fastened upon Tobias. "I don't see your sister, Miss Heppy, Mr. Bassett?"

"You'll have to look twice at me, then, Judge," chuckled the lightkeeper. "She couldn't make it to come, nohow."

Judge Waddams gravely nodded, unlocked a drawer in his table, and drew forth a folded document of portentous appearance. There was considerable stiffening in the chairs and a general clearing of throats. The Judge adjusted his eyeglasses.

"Captain Jethro Potts entrusted me with the drawing of this will, and it was sealed in my presence, and in that of two witnesses who have absolutely no interest in the provisions of the instrument," he said officially. "I will now read it."

The introduction and opening paragraphs held the breathless attention of his audience. There followed itemized gifts of personal property, such as the ancient furnishings of Captain Potts's little home—keepsakes that might or might not satisfy a sentimental feeling in the hearts of the recipients.

Icivilla Potts preened herself over the fact that the walnut highboy which had been the chief piece of furniture in Captain Jethro's parlor had been left to her by the maker of the will. Then:

"'Item: One certain two-gallon jug containing Jamaica rum, to my mother's second cousin, Isaac Bassett—that remaining portion as he shall not have already drunk at the unsealing of this instrument.'"

"Heh? By mighty! An' I drunk the last drop o' that rum just before we took him to

the church to-day," exploded Isaac, more in sorrow than in anger. "Wal, I always did say that you couldn't get the best of Cap'n Jethro Potts, dead or alive—an' this proves it!"

"Sarves ye right," declared Mrs. Andrew Dawson, as the lawyer frowned down Isaac's interruption.

All those present—and some others—had been named for legacies of personal property, saving Tobias. The other relatives of the dead man began to gaze curiously upon the lightkeeper as the list was concluded—Icivilla with scorn.

The lawyer read gravely the next partition of the will. It was to the effect that the testator, having seen clearly that his relatives hereinbefore named were covetous of his money, and would little consider the sentimental value of the above legacies, bequeathed to each person the sum of one dollar to be paid out of his estate by the administrator, Edward Waddams.

This stunning statement smote dumb every listener save Isaac Bassett. He burst into a raucous "Haw! haw!" and slapped his knee as he weaved back and forth in his chair.

"By mighty!" he exploded, "I ain't the only one old Jethro fooled. Haw! Haw!"

The high squeal of Andrew Dawson, who occasionally asserted himself in spite of his wife, rose above the general murmur of disappointment and anger:

"I wanter know, then, what's to become of all Jethro's money! I wanter know *that*!"

"If you folks will keep quiet long enough for me to do so, I will read the remainder of the instrument," Judge Waddams said sharply.

They subsided. But there were few but red and wrathful faces in the company. Icivilla Potts was almost bursting with rage. Judge Waddams continued.

The residue of the estate, which would amount, after all bills were settled and fees paid, to about six thousand dollars, was to be divided equally between Hephzibah Bassett and Tobias Bassett, of Twin Rocks Light, the two relatives of all Captain Jethro Potts's clan, as the will stated, who had never made him feel that they were covetous of his money or wished him out of the way that they might get it.

"Oh, sugar!" murmured Tobias, actually disturbed. "Too bad Cap'n Jethro felt that way about it. I don't believe *all* of them wished him dead."

Judge Waddams looked scornfully over the company now expressing to each other in no unmistakable terms their disappointment and chagrin, and observed to the lightkeeper:

"There's a-many people's feet feel that itch for dead men's shoes, Tobias. I'm glad you and Miss Heppy were favored by Cap'n Jethro. I know of none of his family more deserving."

"Oh, sugar!" rejoined the lightkeeper, "I cal'late Cap'n Jethro didn't much consider me and Heppy's deserts. It was to satisfy his own grudge ag'in 'em that he done this. Still, we are as near to him in blood as ary one of the others. And we didn't never cal'late on getting his money, though I'm frank to say we hoped he'd give us some if he died first.

"Wal, Judge, when you want Heppy and me to sign papers we'll meet you at the Clinkerport Bank. This ain't no place for me just now. Icivilly could purt' near tear me apart. I am going to escape while the escapin' is good," Tobias concluded, chuckling.

He could not play the hypocrite by commiserating with the disappointed crowd. Nor did he wish any of them to congratulate him when their hearts were not at all attuned to such feeling.

"Least said, soonest mended," Tobias secretly observed. "Give 'em time to trim their sails. But won't Heppy be purt' near surprised to death over this? Oh, sugar!"

He was in no mood to discuss the surprising outcome of the funeral of Captain Jethro Potts, even to the curious Clinkerport folks who knew of the reason for his trip down the coast, and who saw him alight from the up train that afternoon.

"Wal, how'd ye make out, Tobias?" asked Ben Durgin, the Clinkerport station agent.

"Purt' tollerble," responded the lightkeeper cheerfully. "Though my feet do ache some in these shoes."

"Did your Uncle Jethro leave much, Tobe?" asked a bolder spirit.

"Wal, as the feller said, he left the earth," chuckled Tobias.

"I say!" exclaimed Ezra Crouch, whose bump of inquisitiveness could only be equaled by Amos Pickering, the mail carrier's, "didn't they read the will, Tobias?"

"Oh, sugar! Yes. So they did," agreed the lightkeeper.

"Wal, then, who's to get his money?"

"Why—there wasn't nobody forgotten," Tobias assured him. "No, sir, not a soul! There ain't no rel'tive of Cap'n Jethro' that can honestly say he or she was forgotten in the will."

Nor was he more communicative when he chanced to meet Ralph Endicott getting out of his roadster in front of the Clinkerport Inn.

"Wal, young feller!" exclaimed the lightkeeper, "what brings you over here from Amperly? Ain't got your lady friend with ye, eh?"

"If you mean Lorna, I have *not.* She has gone to New York on a visit, I understand. But Uncle Henry made me come over here and arrange for one of Tadman's bungalows. He won't hear to our going anywhere else for the summer."

"Which don't please you none, I can see," commented Tobias. "Which one of them bungalows are you going to have?"

"I had to take the one right next to the Nicholet house," said the disgruntled young man. "That was the only one left—it is so late in the renting season. I was hoping to get Uncle Henry to agree to a change for one summer, at least. But nothing doing!"

"I see," observed Tobias, grinning privately.

"Uncle Henry is all wrapped up in a new invention. He wants to be where it is quiet. The goodness knows it's quiet enough at Clay Head."

"I cal'late. Come over to the light, Ralphie, and have a mess of Heppy's fishballs."

"Well, I might drive you home just as well as not," the young fellow agreed, smiling.

"You're a re'l bright boy, Ralphie, even if you can't appreciate Lorny Nicholet."

"Now, stop that, Tobias Bassett!" exclaimed his young friend, exasperated, "or I'll surely overturn you in the ditch," and he threw in his clutch with a vicious jerk as the engine began to purr.

CHAPTER VII

A NEWCOMER

Tobias postponed the telling of the wonderful news to Miss Heppy until after supper and after Ralph Endicott had wheeled away from the Twin Rocks Light in his car. She had crowded down the question until then; but it finally came out with a pop.

"Who did Uncle Jethro leave his money to, Tobias?" she demanded, as he turned away from closing the door.

"To me an' you, Heppy—pretty near every last cent of it."

"Now, stop your funnin'!"

"Ain't funning. It is the truth," her brother said. "Six thousand dollars, nearabout. And if you'd seen Icivilly Potts's face!" he chuckled.

"For love's sake!" gasped Miss Heppy. "It can't be!"

"It *can* be, for it *is*."

"Why, Tobias, we're rich!"

"I cal'late."

"I—I never would have believed it!" exclaimed his sister, and sinking into

her chair she threw her apron over her head and began to sob aloud.

"Oh, sugar! what you cryin' for?" Tobias demanded. "'Cause Icivilly and them others didn't get Uncle Jethro's money? Have some sense, do! This ain't no time for weeping. Just think of what you can do with three thousand dollars."

"You just said six thousand!" ejaculated Miss Heppy, hastily reappearing above the hem of her apron. "Where's half of it gone?"

"Oh, you're to get half and me half. What you going to do with your three thousand, Heppy?"

"Just what you will do with yours, Tobias Bassett!" she exclaimed. "Put it into the Clinkerport Bank to our joint account. We got 'most two thousand there now. We'll have eight thousand against the time when we can't work no more and will need it."

"Oh, sugar!" muttered her brother. "I might ha' knowed it. Your idea of a pleasure spree always was going to the bank to make another ten dollar deposit."

"Now, Tobias," she said with gravity, "don't you let no foolish, spendthrift idees get a holt on your mind. I won't hear to 'em. You never would have had a penny in the bank if it hadn't been for me."

"That's the truth," sighed Tobias. "You got me so that every time a quarter comes my way the dove of peace on it screams for mercy. Yessir! I'm getting to be a reg'lar miser, 'long o' you, Heppy."

The lightkeeper and his sister fully understood and appreciated each other's virtues. That Tobias was generous to a fault and that Hephzibah's saving disposition had long since warded him from financial wreck, they both were well aware. Tobias publicly scorned, however, to acknowledge this latter fact.

"I certainly shall hate to see you turn the key on every dollar of that money, Heppy," he complained, preparing to mount to the lamp to see that all was right up there. "We ain't never cut a dash in our lives. I certainly should like to make a splurge for once."

"You'd fly right in the face of Providence if I wasn't here to hold you back," declared his sister. "Experience can't teach you nothing."

"Oh, sugar! I know I've always spent my paycheck like ducks and drakes," he chuckled. "Wal, leave it to you, Heppy, and Uncle Jethro's money won't get much exercise, for a fact."

When he came down from the lamp he announced a change in the weather. The wind began to whine around the tall staff and rain squalls drifted across the sullenly heaving sea outside the Twin Rocks. The night dissolved into a windy and tumultuous morning, and the fishing fleet remained inside the capes.

Tobias went aloft after breakfast to clean and fill the lamp before taking his usual morning nap. To the eastward rode a dun-colored object that at first could scarcely be made out, even by his keen eyes.

"It's a craft of some kind—sure is!" he muttered. "But whether it's turned bottom up, or is one o' them there motor-boats, decked over for'ard and without no mast—Hi! There's a mast of a kind, and with a pennant to it, or something. Mebbe 'tis the feller's shirt."

That the motor craft was in some trouble the lightkeeper was confident. The heavy seas buffeted it without mercy. He saw that the master of the craft could not keep steerageway upon it.

"He'll be swamped, first thing he knows," muttered the anxious lightkeeper. "Yep! he's put up some kind of a flag for help. But, sugar! nobody won't see him from inside the harbor—an' there ain't another livin' craft upon the sea."

Tobias hurried down from the lamp gallery. The cove between the light and the Clay Head was empty of all craft so early in the season. In fact, the only boats in sight were his own sloop, still high and dry upon the sands at the base of the lighthouse, and the heavy dory from which he trolled for rock-fish as he chanced to have time on the outer edge of the reefs.

He flung a word to Heppy, and she ran out and helped him launch the dory.

"You have a care, Tobias," she cried after him as he settled the oars between the thole-pins. "Remember you ain't so young as you used to be."

"Oh, sugar!" he returned, "I ain't likely to forget it as long as your tongue can wag, Heppy."

The heaving gray waves roared over the rocks in great bursts of foam. The tiny, sheltered bight between the reefs had offered a more or less quiet launching for the dory, but the lightkeeper was soon in the midst of flying spume, his craft tossed and buffeted by the broken water that eddied off the points of the reef.

He drove clear of this in a few moments and pushed out to sea. Rising on a "seventh wave"—a particularly big one—Tobias glanced over his shoulder. The wallowing motor-boat was still right side up. There seemed to be but one person in it. The pennant whipped from the short staff in the stern where the figure of the man was likewise to be distinguished.

"She's broken down complete," muttered the old lightkeeper, "and he's keeping her head to it with an oar."

He settled himself for the long and arduous pull before him. In his youth he had many times managed a dory—sometimes laden with fish from the trawl-lines—in a worse sea than this. Tough in fibre as the ash oar he drove, was Tobias Bassett. He did not overlook the possible peril in this trip to the unmanageable motor-boat, but he had taken just such chances often and again.

Spoondrift, dashed from the caps of the waves, drenched him. When he turned his head now and again to make sure of his course, this spray spat viciously in his face. Little whirlwinds swooped down upon the sea and turned certain areas of it into boiling cauldrons of yellow foam.

"Looks like a caliker cat in a fit," was Tobias's comment on one occasion.

But these squalls were for the most part ignored by the lightkeeper. They were unpleasant visitations, but he knew the dory could weather them.

He pushed on unfalteringly. Glancing from time to time over his shoulder, Tobias saw that the occupant of the stalled motor-boat had sunk down in her cockpit. He seemed to have lost his steering oar, and the craft was being tossed whithersoever the sea would.

"The poor fish!" growled Tobias. "He's likely to find a watery grave after all. Must be something the matter with him."

As the dory drew nearer the lightkeeper saw a pallid face staring at him over the gunnel of the motor-boat. The boat had shipped considerable water and was wallowing deep in the sea; but the man seemed unable even to bail out.

"Crippled—must be," decided the rescuer, at last. "I'd better get to him soon, or he'll lose all holts."

Despite the boisterous seas the lightkeeper brought his dory skilfully alongside the tossing motor-boat. The wan face of the young fellow in it advertised his woe.

"What's the matter with ye?" bawled Tobias.

"I've hurt my foot!" replied the man. "I guess I've sprained it."

"Oh, sugar! That might ha' kept ye from walking ashore. But what's the matter with your boat?"

"The engine won't run, and the steering-gear is fouled. I haven't been able to do a thing with it since daybreak."

"Hard luck!" returned Tobias. "Better come aboard here. Can ye make it alone?"

"Can't you tow me? I don't want to lose my boat. It cost a lot of money."

"Likely. But I ain't no sea-going towboat," said the lightkeeper. "If I undertook to try to tow your boat, we'd bring up about to the Bahamas. You'll have to kiss it good-bye, I cal'late."

"I'll pay you well," cried the other.

"Can't be did," said Tobias confidently. "Now, then, when I throw her to ye, be ready to crawl over the gunnels. We ain't got no time to jabber. Stand by!"

Seeing that the old man was firm in his intention, the castaway prepared awkwardly to make the exchange. He was doused between the two boats, but Tobias Bassett's strong hand helped him inboard, or a tragedy might have been enacted. The castaway was a man in the early twenties, and not at all robust looking. Nor did his countenance very favorably impress the rescuer.

"Still, ye can't scurcely judge the good points of a drowned rat," Tobias considered, as the man he had rescued squatted in the stern of the dory, nursing his right foot and groaning.

"Tell me all about it," the rescuer suggested. "How did it happen?"

"I left Nantucket yesterday noon, going to Boston."

"All the weather-wise folks on Nantucket must be dead, eh? Or didn't nobody tell ye to take the inside passage?"

"Well, I thought I could make it outside before it blew really hard. And I could have done so, only for that engine."

"I see."

"Then I fell and twisted my foot. It's swollen, you see. Can't put my weight on it."

"Too bad," grunted the lightkeeper between strokes. "And you been battin' off and on here all night?"

"Pretty near."

"Lucky I spied ye. It's going to blow harder before it gets through. You didn't stand much chance of being picked up by any other craft, so far inshore."

"I hate to lose my boat," complained the castaway.

"You like to have lost your life, young feller," said Tobias, seriously. "You can get another motorboat easier. What's your name?"

"Conway Degger. I belong in Boston."

"Do ye, now? Come o' rich folks, I cal'late?"

"Not rich enough to throw away a motor-boat like that."

"Oh, sugar! I s'pose not. If the wind shifts she may come ashore."

"She'll be smashed up."

"Mebbe not past mending," said Tobias, trying to be comforting. "Anyhow, you be glad, young feller, that ye got out of it as slick as ye did."

"I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful," groaned Degger, caressing his bruised foot. "But motor-boats don't grow on bushes."

"Never thought they did. Or I should try if one o' them bushes would grow in Heppy's garden," chuckled the lightkeeper.

It was a long and hard pull to make the lighthouse landing. It was near noon, and Tobias had rowed steadily for four hours, when the dory grounded upon the sands with the surf roaring over the reefs between which he had skilfully steered.

"Wal, we made it, didn't we?" sighed the lightkeeper, with a measure of sarcasm quite lost upon Mr. Degger. "One spell I didn't know as we would—you bein' crippled and helpless like you be."

"I am a thousand times obliged to you, Skipper," said Degger, quite warmly, as he cautiously stood on one foot like a sandhill crane. "I don't know how to thank you."

"No, I see ye don't," observed Tobias. "But ne'er mind. I got an attic full of 'thank-yous.' Don't try to give me no more. Come up to the light and have dinner. I smell fish chowder, and I do think my Sister Heppy can make fish chowder 'bout

right."

Conway Degger evidently agreed with the lightkeeper regarding Miss Heppy's cooking. After Tobias had aided the cripple to hop up the strand and to the light, and had introduced him to Miss Heppy, Degger proceeded to make himself quite at home. Miss Heppy plodded up the spiral stairway to the lamp room after dinner to consult with her brother.

"He wants I should take him to board for a spell," she said. "He seems a civil spoken sort of boy. I s'pose we could put him in the spare room, now that you've finally got new winder-sashes for it."

"Wal, I s'pose you could."

"He wants to stay till his foot gets better. It's as black as your hat. I been bandaging it."

"Did he want a bandage put on his pocketbook, too?"

"Now, Tobias! He's going to pay me four dollars."

"For the bandage?"

"A week. For his board."

"That's mighty good——"

"Why——"

"For *him*," finished the lightkeeper. "But it's your business, Heppy, not mine. Seein's we are only going to have 'bout eight thousand dollars in the bank, I presume you'd better take boarders to help out."

"Now, Tobias Bassett! it behooves us to make money while we may. We ain't gettin' any younger."

"I agree with you," said her brother. "And I don't believe we'll be wickedly overburdened with all the money you make out of this Degger feller."

For Tobias had judged fairly accurately that young man's idiosyncrasies. There was nothing of the spendthrift about Mr. Conway Degger.

CHAPTER VIII

PHILOSOPHY AND OTHER THINGS

Tobias Bassett was a social soul and the "boarder," as he insisted upon calling the young man he had rescued from the motor-boat, was not tongue-tied. Get Degger set on a course, as Tobias termed it, relating to his own exploits, and the young fellow became more than voluble.

The lightkeeper and Miss Heppy certainly were surprised to learn that their visitor was acquainted with the Nicholets.

"You don't mean to tell me that that is the Nicholets' summer home up on that bluff? That first one yonder?" said the young man.

"That's it," replied Tobias, sitting on the bench beside the lighthouse door to smoke an after-supper pipe. "I see the storm shutters are down. They'll be coming soon, I cal'late."

"And Miss Lorna comes here every summer? A charming girl."

Tobias looked at him fixedly.

"I don't suppose you'd be knowing Ralph Endicott? The Endicotts will occupy the house next to the Nicholets."

"The Endicotts of Amperly?"

"Them's the ones. Ralph is the one I mean. Feller 'bout your age, mebbe."

"If it is the Ralph Endicott I know," said Degger, the expression of his face changing, "he and I were at Harvard together."

"You don't say!" Tobias's eyes twinkled. The reason for the familiar sound of the boarder's name was suddenly explained. This was the "Conny Degger" Ralph had spoken of, for whose society Lorna had once shown a penchant. "I cal'late you know Ralph pretty well, then?" insinuated the lightkeeper.

"Oh, I was never chummy with Ralph Endicott," Degger observed. "He and I were scarcely in the same set." Which was strictly true. Nobody could doubt it. Then he verged on rather thin ice: "You see, Ralph's kind are high-flyers." He dropped his voice a notch and glanced around to make sure that Miss Heppy was not within hearing. "Fellows like Ralph Endicott don't go to college altogether to study."

"I give it as my opinion," admitted Tobias, placidly smoking, "that some of 'em go mostly to learn about the breeds o' bulldogs—both pipes and canine. And they study how to play cards, and to dress as fancy as a nigger minstrel. I've seen some of that kind. But Ralph——"

"No. He did not run to those foibles, I believe. But there was a girl—well, you know how it is with some fellows, Skipper. Every pretty face attracts them, and there are plenty of girls of light ideas in every college town. Cambridge is no exception."

"Oh, sugar!" ejaculated the lightkeeper. "I wouldn't think it of Ralph."

"Sly boy!" chuckled Conny Degger grinning. "Guess his folks never knew much about it. They are straight-laced, I fancy. But he was seen a good deal with Cora Devine—and she was not all she should be."

"Oh, sugar!" exclaimed Tobias again. "Maybe 'twas only a boy and girl flirtation."

"*She* was no innocent kid. Believe me, Skipper, that Devine girl knew her

way about. Why, I was told she'd been trooping with a burlesque show. Ralph Endicott made a perfect jack of himself over her. It was even rumored that they ran off and were married once when he was half-stewed."

Tobias jumped on the bench and uttered a startled exclamation.

"What is the matter, Skipper?"

"Must o' been one of them pesky sandfleas," muttered the lightkeeper. "Wal, go on with your tale o' crime."

"Ha! Ha! No crime about it. Just Endicott's foolishness. If he did marry her, I'm sorry for him. She'll be bobbing up to confront him later. Such girls always do. They are expensive trimmings to a fellow's college career."

"I cal'late," agreed Tobias, more calmly.

But later he sounded Heppy on a topic which he had not touched upon since back in the late winter when Lorna and Ralph had been stormbound at the light.

"Didn't Lorny say something to you about Ralph paying 'tentions to some gal at college? Wasn't she some worked up about it?"

"For love's sake, Tobias, she never spoke as though she'd feel jealous any if Ralph Endicott had forty girls! I should say not! She did mention that Ralph had some love affair when he was at school. But she called it puppy love," concluded Miss Heppy, with a sniff.

"Humph! Sort o' scorned it, did she? It didn't seem to worry her none?"

"Worry her? I should say not! But I guess 'twas only gossip at that. I don't believe Ralph Endicott is the sort of a boy to play fast and loose with any girl."

"Does seem as though we feel about alike on that score, Heppy," reflected her brother. "Ralph, it strikes me, is purt' sound timber. But I wonder, now, where Lorna Nicholet got her information about Ralph's chasing around after that chorus gal? Does seem as though such a story *might* be one o' the things that makes Lorna so determined to cut Ralph adrift. Oh, sugar!"

But these final reflections of the lightkeeper were inaudible. He had by no means lost interest in his matchmaking intrigue regarding the two young people who he was convinced were "jest about made for each other."

His scheme—if scheme he had—had been in abeyance all these weeks. Now that the families of the young people were about to take up their residence on the Clay Head, he proposed to enter upon a more active campaign for what he believed to be the happiness of all concerned.

Not alone was Miss Heppy aware of the long-past bond of affection between Miss Ida Nicholet and Ralph's Uncle Henry. Tobias Bassett had been just as observant as his sister—or anybody else.

Like others, he had wondered twenty years before why the then young Professor Endicott had not pursued with more vigor the charming, if independent, Ida Nicholet, and made her his bride. *There* was a romance nipped in the bud which

Tobias always felt he might have mended—"if he'd put his mind to it."

In any case he determined not to see the ship of Ralph and Lorna's happiness cast on the rocks if he could help it. He felt that it might be within his power to avert such disaster. The strategic yeast of the true matchmaker began to stir within him.

"Miss Ida," as everybody called Lorna's assertive aunt, could not be long in any place without making her presence felt. Her original and independent character never failed to make its impress upon all domestic, as well as other, affairs. The Nicholet ménage was run like clockwork. Miss Ida was the clock. Everything at the big house on Clay Head was soon working smoothly, and Miss Ida could look about.

She was a tall, free-striding, graceful woman without a gray thread in her abundant dark hair. She piled that hair low at the back of her head, and her neck and throat were like milk, and flawless.

When she came across the barrens under her rose-tinted parasol to see Miss Heppy at the Light, her plain morning dress was arranged as carefully as a ball gown would be on another woman. In addition, her pleasant eyes and round, firm chin, together with her Junoesque figure, made her appearance most attractive.

"Well, Heppy, how do you do?" she asked, her voice mellow and full. "How has the winter gone with you?"

"'Bout the same as usual, Miss Ida," the lightkeeper's sister replied. "You *be* a pretty sight. None o' the young ones can put anything over you, Miss Ida. You ain't got a wrinkle or a fleck of gray in your head."

Miss Ida laughed. "I'm forty-two. I'm frank to admit it. Why shouldn't a woman be well preserved and in good health at my age if she has never made herself a slave to some man?"

"For love's sake! As for *that*, I ain't never been married. But look at my wrinkles!"

"Those are creases, not wrinkles, in your case, Heppy," laughed the visitor. "You are getting too fat. And you have been practically a slave for Tobias."

"Sure she has," agreed the lightkeeper grinning. "I've been thinking of putting a nose-ring on her. She's abused, all right."

"You hush, Tobias! I ain't slaved for nobody *but* him, Miss Ida," declared Hephzibah warmly. "While you, Miss Ida, have shouldered the responsibility for your brother and all his family. If you'd married," added the longshore woman wisely, "like enough you wouldn't have had nowhere near so big a family to care for."

"I wonder?" laughed the other woman. Yet her expressive countenance became immediately serious. "My family is pretty well grown now, Heppy. I am sure even Lorna is old enough to make a nest for herself. She has been out two

years."

"Out o' what?" Tobias asked, taking the pipe from his mouth and staring. "Looks to me as though she was well supplied with most everything a young gal ought to have, an' wasn't out o' nothing."

"I mean she has been in society two years."

"Oh, sugar! That's a case, is it, of when you're *out*, you're *in*?" chuckled the lightkeeper. "I give it as my opinion that the only thing Lorny lacks is a good husband."

Miss Ida flushed softly. "I hope she will see the advisability of choosing wisely in that matter," the aunt said, speaking intimately to these two old friends, at the expression of whose interest in her family affairs she was far too sensible to take offence.

"Yes," she pursued. "You know what hopes her father and I have for her. An eminently fitting alliance. And Ralph is a manly fellow. It does seem as though those two were quite made for each other."

"Humph! Yes. 'Twould seem so," muttered Tobias. "But it does appear sometimes as though the very things that *ought* to be don't somehow come around to happen."

"You are a philosopher, Tobias."

"Dunno as that's a compliment, Miss Ida," rejoined the lightkeeper, his eyes twinkling. "I got all my wits about me yet, and most of them philosophers you hear tell about ain't. They get on some hobby and ride it to death. And a man ain't really broad-minded unless he can see both sides to a question.

"Now, takin' the chances for and against your Lorna and Ralph Endicott marryin'. What would you say, Miss Ida, was the one best bet?"

He looked up at her shrewdly, holding his pipe with that familiar gesture of his. Miss Ida's gravity grew more profound.

"I believe you and Heppy must know that of late my niece and Ralph have seemed to fret one another?" she queried.

"They give themselves away some when they stopped over here that time they got stalled in Ralph's car," admitted Tobias. "Warn't it jest a leetle spat?"

"I am afraid not. They have not seemed the same since. And I am afraid it is Lorna's fault," sighed Miss Ida. "She is so hot-tempered. I have warned her. The families have never considered any other possible outcome but an alliance between Lorna and Ralph. I have told her so."

"I cal'late you have," murmured Tobias softly, pulling on his pipe again.

"When she returns from New York—as she will in a day or two—I shall put the matter to her very strongly. If you and Heppy have noticed their drifting asunder, other people must have noticed it too. The Nicholets would be utterly disgraced if it were said that Ralph Endicott—er—dropped Lorna. And if he should,

I fear it will be my niece's own fault."

When she was gone Tobias snorted suddenly.

"Oh, sugar!" he said. "If I scorch 'em a mite graced, I want to know, when Miss Ida's love affair with Professor Endicott busted up? Seems to me that leetle gal, Lorny, is going to be put upon by her folks. *That* won't do."

"Now, do try to mind your own business, Tobias," advised his sister, comfortably rocking. "I know it will be hard for you to do so. But you'll burn your fingers, like enough, if you don't."

The lightkeeper spread out his gnarled, work-blunted fingers to observe them reflectively.

"Oh, sugar!" he said. "If I scorch 'em a mite helping that leetle gal and Ralph Endicott out o' their muss, what's the odds, Heppy? You know, we're put here to help each other."

"That is what most folks say that have an itch for minding other people's business. Now, you have a care what you do, Tobias Bassett."

CHAPTER IX

THE DROP OF WORMWOOD

When Lorna Nicholet first appeared at the Twin Rocks Light after arriving at her summer home, she gave no evidence of needing the lightkeeper's—or any other person's—good offices. She was her usual brisk, contented and fun-loving self.

Conway Degger chanced to be present when Lorna came to the Light. Miss Ida had not seen the young man when she had called on Tobias and Heppy.

"What a surprise, Mr. Degger!" the girl said, giving him a warmly welcoming hand. "I had no idea you were in this locality."

"I am a waif from the sea, Miss Nicholet," he told her. "You ask the skipper, here, about it. I can never thank him enough. And Miss Heppy, too, who has so kindly taken me in and ministered to my well-being."

"He says it pretty, don't he now?" whispered Miss Heppy to Tobias.

"Pretty is as pretty does," muttered the lightkeeper. "Somehow them fanciful speeches of his'n don't bait much trawl with me."

But Miss Heppy considered Conny Degger quite worthy of approval. Lorna found him interesting, too. Perhaps the very fact that her Aunt Ida had opposed her acquaintance with the young man caused Lorna to be the more contrary. And,

really, Degger betrayed some rather attractive traits.

During the next few days the girl and the boarder at Twin Rocks Light became close companions. They went fishing together in Tobias's dory. They tramped the beach as far as the Lower Trillion life-saving station, Degger's sprained foot being quite well again. And the young man appeared regularly on the Clay Head bathing beach at the morning bathing hour.

Among the few families already at the resort, who made up a little social world of their own, it soon became a topic of conversation—this companionship of Lorna Nicholet and Conny Degger. Particularly was it commented upon, because for so many summers the girl and Ralph Endicott had been such close chums.

Although the Endicotts had already arrived at the Clay Head, Ralph did not at once put in an appearance. This fact perhaps threw Lorna the more into Conny Degger's company. Tongues began to wag.

"I should say," squeaked Amos Pickering, who was a very busy man these days because of the influx of summer visitors, "that Lorny Nicholet has got another feller. That long-laiged Endicott boy's always been tagging her other summers. Now this here boarder you got, Tobias, is stickin' to her like a barnacle. What d'ye think it'll amount to?"

"I give it as my opinion," retorted the lightkeeper, pursing his lips, "that it won't add none to your burdens, Amos. I don't see no weddin' invitations in the offing for you to distribute."

"She's jest a-flirtin', is she?"

"Like a sandpiper," declared Tobias. "Keepin' her hand in as ye might say. There ain't a mite o' harm in Lorny, but she's got to have some amusement."

He was nevertheless glad to see Ralph arrive. The lightkeeper believed that Lorna would much better have her old friend at hand to compare Degger with.

Had he been present at the first meeting of the trio, Tobias Bassett might have experienced some doubt of the value after all of such comparison. Lorna greeted Ralph very coolly. She and Degger were about to launch the lightkeeper's dory for a fishing trip when Ralph came striding down from the Clay Head.

"'Lo, Ralph," was the girl's careless hail. "Did you put the bait-pail in, Mr. Degger?"

"All right, Miss Lorna. It's right here. How do, Endicott?"

"I heard you were here, Degger," said Ralph, merely nodding to Lorna. "What's running now?"

"Mostly squeteague and fluke," replied the girl. "Occasionally a tautog on rocky bottom. No snappers yet."

"Nothing worthy of Your Majesty's prowess," gibed Degger. "I understand you are a real fisherman," and he pushed off the boat.

Ralph's gaze narrowed and his brow clouded. He sat down on the sand.

There was room enough in the dory for a third; but neither of them had suggested his joining them.

Perhaps Ralph's attitude was not exactly that of a dog in the manger. But it did trouble him to see his erstwhile chum so friendly with Conny Degger. Not that he knew of anything actually bad about the fellow. Merely, he had seemed so inconsequential and, at times, rather vulgar.

Ralph was quite aware that some men are one thing to their masculine friends while they act entirely differently in the company of women. Degger, he thought, was of that kind. He hated to see Lorna "mixing up," as he termed it, with the fellow.

He was not wise enough—wise in women's ways—to hide this feeling from Lorna's sharp vision. She flattered herself that her old friend was displaying jealousy. This supposition could not fail to please her. Ralph had become such a nuisance in her opinion, that she was determined to show him that she could easily attract other men. She would flout him and his whole family—as well as her own—by playing about with Conny Degger.

"Ralph thinks that he is the only man who ever pays me any attention," Lorna secretly ruminated. "And goodness knows, he has hung around so close that almost everybody else has been driven off. Conceited! That is just what Ralph Endicott is. Always looking over a tall collar at the rest of the world. If he didn't believe that Adam's last name was Endicott he never would admit relationship with the first of the race! Humph!"

So she treated Degger particularly nicely on this occasion. She overlooked some rather crude things about the young man, and from the shore where Ralph lay she appeared to be having a most delightful time with her fishing partner.

It made her angry to see how Ralph hung around. She delayed coming ashore as long as she could, hoping he would go away. She did not want a scene with him.

Ralph, however, did not even rise from his recumbent position when the fishing party beached the dory on the strand between the out-thrust reefs. Lorna hurried away, and Ralph did not attempt to join her, as she had feared he would. Instead, he got up slowly and aided Degger draw up the lightkeeper's dory.

"Awf'ly nice girl, that," said Degger boldly.

"Yes."

"Good sport, too. I never met a nicer girl."

"I don't believe you ever did," said the other, his level gaze boring Degger rather unpleasantly.

"Oh, I don't know!" ejaculated Degger, with sudden warmth and a sneer on his lips. "I've known a lot of girls——"

"But not of her kind," broke in Ralph. "And don't you think it! Watch your

step with Lorna."

"What's the matter with you, Endicott?" snapped Degger. "I don't have to take orders from you."

"Not as long as you go straight you don't," Ralph assured him. "But we all think too much of Lorna Nicholet around her to see anybody try to misbehave with her."

"Oh—you——"

"I know a few things about you. It's none of my business what you try out with other girls," Ralph hastily added. "But you be mighty careful with Lorna."

He turned on his heel then and strode away. Degger sneered after him.

"Think's he is the Great I Am!" he muttered. "You'd think he owned the girl. And putting on his airs with *me*!" Degger's scowl grew darker as he added: "Guess the beggar wants me to pay up. That is like these rich fellows. They are mighty free offering to lend you money; but they make you feel the obligation forever after."

Now, Conway Degger quite wronged Ralph on this point. The latter had entirely forgotten that Degger was in his debt from some time back in their college days.

Indeed, Ralph Endicott was never one to trouble about money, for he never remembered putting his hand into his pocket when he wanted that commodity without finding it. His family had been wealthy for generations. Just how well-to-do they were in the present generation he had never troubled to ask. Uncle Henry and the family attorneys attended to all that.

It did seem odd that just at this time the money matters of other people should begin to disturb Ralph Endicott. Not that he bothered his head about Conny Degger's affairs. It was somebody entirely different of whose financial difficulties he was unexpectedly made aware.

Coming up from the shore following his brief conversation with Degger, Ralph found the old lightkeeper mending a seine outside the lighthouse door.

"Wal, now," said Tobias, "ye look some het up. I seen ye soaking yourself out there on the sand in the sun, and I cal'lated you'd look like a b'iled lobster when you come up. And you do."

Ralph knew that it was an angry flush Tobias saw on his face. He grinned ruefully.

"More than the sun to make a fellow's blood boil, Mr. Bassett, sometimes."

"Oh, sugar!" rejoined the lightkeeper. "Ye don't let that feller bother ye none, do you, Ralph?"

"I do not like him much," the young man said stiffly.

"You mean you don't like him to be fooling around Lorny, hey?" said Tobias, his head shrewdly on one side.

"It is none of *my* business——"

"Course it is! Course it is!" exclaimed the lightkeeper vigorously. "I've just about sized this Degger feller up, I cal'late. His folks ain't any too well off, and I bet he'll never get round-shouldered carrying his money around."

"What has that to do with it, Mr. Bassett?" demanded Ralph, rather startled.

"Why, Lorny can't afford to waste her time with a feller like him," the lightkeeper declared coolly. "She's got to marry somebody with money. I know by the way Miss Ida was talkin' the other day over here, she was worried about Lorny marrying."

"What *do* you mean, Tobias Bassett?" ejaculated Ralph, dropping down on the bench beside him.

"Why, I cal'late you know more about the Nicholets' affairs than I do."

"I don't understand you at all," said the young man. "Do you mean to say——"

"That Lorny's got to marry money—yep!" exclaimed Tobias, pursing his lips and nodding. "It 'ud ease matters a whole lot for Miss Ida and Lorny's father if she gets a rich husband. Why, Ralph! I s'posed you knowed *that*."

"I never dreamed it!"

"Cal'late that is why they were so anxious for you and her to make a match of it," pursued the lightkeeper. "O' course, she don't know nothing about it. But I give it as my opinion that a rich husband for Lorny is going to take a great burden off the shoulders of her family."

"You amaze me." Ralph's face was a study.

"So ye see," said Tobias, with a cheerfulness that grated on Ralph's nerves, "this Degger feller, unless he's got more money than he's showed any sign of having, ain't got no chance with Lorna. Leastways," he added, "not with her folks."

"I—I never thought of it before," said Ralph reflectively, "but I do not think Degger has much money."

"Then he'd better be shooed away from the vicinity, as ye might say," the matchmaker said vigorously. "For if you air bound not to marry her yourself, Ralph, no use her fallin' into the lap of a poor man."

"You know very well Lorna wouldn't marry me, Tobias Bassett!" exclaimed Ralph angrily. "You needn't talk as though *I* were at fault."

"Oh, sugar! I don't see you fallin' over your own feet none, young man, to *make* her marry ye."

"Don't you remember how she talked to me that night we were stormbound here? Didn't she fairly drive me out of the lighthouse right at the worst of the gale? You said yourself it wasn't a night fit for a dog to be out in. If I'd undertaken to walk to Clinkerport they'd have found me along the road somewhere, frozen stiff! That's all she cared about me."

"Oh, sugar!" said Tobias again, "I wouldn't hold that against her. She's spir-

ited, Lorny is. She was mad with you——"

"I should say she was!"

"But she didn't re'lly mean it," pursued the lightkeeper. "If she had thought you were in danger she'd never driv' you out. I'm sartain sure, Ralph, that she thinks a heap of you."

"She shows it!"

"No, she don't show it. No more than you show how you re'lly feel toward her."

"Huh!"

"Oh, I know," declared Tobias wagging a confident head. "You wouldn't see no harm come to Lorny. That's why I tell you as I do that this Degger—'nless he's a sight richer than he 'pears to be—ain't got no business shining around her. I give it as my opinion that Lorna's friends have got to come to her rescue and see that she marries a rich man."

He stopped right there. Tobias Bassett was wise in his iniquity. Without coming out unequivocally and stating in so many words that the Nicholets had lost the greater part of their wealth, he had intimated enough to trouble the waters of Ralph's mind.

The latter could not visualize the luxury-loving, softly-bred girl as a poor man's wife. Why, Lorna never could in this world endure privation, or even a lack of those things which only money—and plenty of it—could purchase.

"Poor girl!" was the young man's secret thought. "She has always expected to have plenty of money in her own right some day. Wonder what John Nicholet has been doing with the family fortune? Speculating, I bet! He's a visionary chap.

"But—but it seems terrible for Lorna if she must marry wealth to save the family from penury. And she all unconscious of the fate in store for her. It is a wicked, wicked shame!"

CHAPTER X

STARTING SOMETHING

It was long before this that the lightkeeper and his sister had been put in possession of Jethro Potts' personal estate by Judge Waddams. The nine days' wonder of that happening was past for Clinkerport folk, and as the old couple made no splurge with their fortune, the neighbors put aside the matter for fresher gossip.

With a stern hand Miss Heppy had put down incipient rebellion on her brother's part. The legacy added to what they already had in the bank made "just a little bit more."

"And that's purt' average unsatisfying," complained Tobias on occasion.

"You mean to tell me, Tobias Bassett, that it ain't a satisfying feeling to know you got nigh eight thousand dollars in the bank?"

"It's jest so much more of a temptation to Arad Thompson," sighed her brother. "Dunno as we'd be found guiltless if the bank did bust and Arad Thompson should run off with the funds."

"I cal'late he won't run far in that wheel chair," said Heppy, perhaps with additional confidence because of the bank president's affliction.

However, their simple minds could not fail to be fixed upon the nest-egg a good part of the time. When one has worked and scraped to get together a few dollars over a long stretch of years, the sudden access of comparative riches cannot fail to become and continue to be a very important topic of thought.

Whenever Tobias took his pay check to the bank and drew the cash needed for their household expenses, he secretly desired to ask the cashier, Mr. Bentley, to let him see that eight thousand in real money so as to be sure the bank was still safely guarding it.

Tobias usually went to Clinkerport in the sloop *Marybird* on these marketing expeditions, now that the weather was good. Conny Degger on a certain occasion went with him.

Degger's salvage from the wrecked motor-boat had been an oar, one seat-cushion, and a broken pennant staff. In other words the craft had been a total loss. And this fact appeared to worry the boarder considerably.

He paid his weekly stipend of four dollars to Miss Heppy with admirable promptness, and he had sent for a fairly well-filled trunk, so that he made a presentable appearance in public. But he seemed to be, as Tobias had hinted to Ralph, not overburdened with money.

At least, he spent little in the sight of the lightkeeper. He did not even treat the latter to a good cigar, as might have been expected when Tobias gave him passage in the *Marybird* to and from Clinkerport.

"He ain't no three-minute egg, that's sure," was the lightkeeper's comment to his sister. "He's hard-boiled all right."

Nor did Degger seem to make himself popular with the loafers around the Clinkerport Inn and the livery stable, as so many of the youthful summer visitors did. On one occasion, however, Tobias heard, and saw the boarder in earnest conference with a man who seemed to be quite well acquainted in Clinkerport, although he was not a resident.

"Well, Conny, take it from me," said this individual, "somebody has got to

pay for that motor-boat. When a fellow treats me right I'm the easiest person who ever did another a good turn. But they say patience runs out of virtue after a while. That's my case exactly."

"But I haven't any money to spare at present, Burtwell," complained Degger, quite loud enough for the lightkeeper to hear.

"Get busy then and find some. How do you manage to live, I want to know?"

"On expectations," Degger rejoined airily.

"Huh! I've seen her. She *looks* all to the good," Burtwell said coarsely. "Folks rich, I suppose?"

"As cream," admitted the optimistic Degger.

"And you expect to make a killing, Con?"

"I fancy I am not altogether wasting my time," the younger man drawled in a tone that made Tobias want to kick him.

"Well," Burtwell said, "I can't afford to wait forever for the money I had to advance on that motor-boat transaction. I tell you there is a limit to my patience. But there may be a way for you to help me—and yourself—to some of the wherewithal."

The lightkeeper took his packages then and passed the couple on the store porch. He did not glance at Degger, nor did he wait for the fellow to join him at the dock. He got under way in the *Marybird* and let the boarder exercise his legs on the shell road if he wanted to get back to the Light for supper.

"Something's got to be done," ruminated Tobias, tacking for the cove, in which he moored the sloop hard by the lighthouse. "This here feller may be able to rush Lorny an' tie her up to some contract 'fore she knows what he's about. He seems a'mighty sure of himself.

"I cal'late," pursued the lightkeeper, "that as the angels fear to tread on this matrimonial path—as Heppy says—it's up to me to do so. I ain't going to see little Lorny get stung in no marriage game. Nor yet I don't mean Ralph shall lose all holts. Something's got to be done."

It seemed as though circumstances played into his hands. Tobias was conceited enough perhaps to believe that he really was foredoomed to act the part of matchmaker. At any rate, there was Lorna on the shore when the *Marybird* drifted in to her moorings, the site of which was marked by a nail keg.

Tobias picked up the bight of the anchor cable and looped it upon a becket, taking a turn or two for safety. Then he drew up the dory, put aboard his purchases, locked the *Marybird's* cabin, and sculled ashore. Lorna smiled upon him.

"Nice day, Lorny."

"So it is, Mr. Bassett. Didn't Mr. Degger come home with you?"

"Oh, sugar! I forgot all about him, didn't I? Did you want to see him partic'lar, Lorny?"

"Just wanted somebody to play with," she confessed.

"Wal! wal! you air to be pitied," he said. "Won't Ralph do?"

She made him a little face, but flushed too.

"Ralph Endicott is no fun any more. He's as grouchy as a sore-headed bear."

"I want to know!"

"Yes. He's going away soon, anyway, I understand. And I'm glad of it," the girl declared.

"Oh, sugar! I suppose that's so," reflected Tobias, filling his pipe. "Wal, a feller can't always appear chirpy an' lively when things is going wrong with him."

She flashed him a look of suspicion. "What do you mean by that, Tobias Bassett?"

"Er—wal, like enough he don't feel any too happy. I give it as my opinion that none of the Endicotts do, right now. Wal!"

He sighed reflectively, and slowly pulled on his pipe to get it well alight. Lorna continued to stare at him, a little puzzled frown marring her brow.

"You are the most mysterious person," she said. "Tell me straight out what you mean."

"Oh, sugar! I don't guess I need to tell you what Ralph's trouble is."

She flushed more deeply then, and her eyes began to spark. "If you are hinting that I have anything to do with making Ralph Endicott unhappy——"

"Not a-tall! Not a-tall!" the lightkeeper hastened to say. "But I reckoned you'd know full as much about the Endicott's private affairs as I do."

"Mr. Bassett! what *is* it?"

"Why, ain't you even heard about it?" exclaimed the old fellow most innocently. "Didn't nobody tell you how the Endicotts have lost purt' near all their money? Oh, sugar! ain't you heard?"

"Never!"

"Wal, they do say Henry Endicott has jest about wrecked the family fortune putterin' with them inventions of his. 'Tain't to be wondered at. Might have been expected. Foolin' away both time and money. Yessir!"

Each of these phrases was emitted between puffs of tobacco smoke which served as a screen for the expression on the lightkeeper's countenance.

"Lost their money? The Endicotts? You can't mean it!" ejaculated Lorna.

"Does seem too bad," went on Tobias. "'Twarn't Ralph's fault, of course. But he feels it, I cal'late, as bad as any of 'em. Like enough he's goin' away from here, like you say, to get him a job of work. I shouldn't wonder," sighed the guileful Tobias.

"Why, Mr. Bassett, this is *awful*!" There was real sympathy in Lorna's shocked tone.

"I cal'late that if your Aunt Ida did have a liking for Professor Endicott years

ago she was wise to turn him down. Yes'm. She likely foresaw the snarl that was comin' through Henry's puttering with these inventions. Your Aunt Ida is a wise woman, Lorny."

"Why, Mr. Bassett!" ejaculated Lorna, some displeasure in both her tone and look, "Aunt Ida is not like that. She is the least mercenary person I know."

"Wal, p'r'aps. I don't know. But she'll mebbe be just as well satisfied now that you did turn Ralph down. Of course, a feller that's got to work for his livin'—has his own way to make in the world—wouldn't do for you."

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Bassett," cried the girl, her head high, her cheeks red, and already tight-lipped with wrath. "You have no right to say that."

"Oh, sugar! I warn't meaning nothing out the way," said Tobias easily. "It's a good thing you and Ralphie got over your foolishness 'bout each other. Now, ain't it so?"

"You have no right—I won't listen—oh, Tobias Bassett! Is it really so that the Endicotts are poor? Has Ralph really got to go to work? Why! he never hinted at such a thing when he told me he was going away."

"Guess you ain't been showing him much sympathy, have ye?" rejoined the callous Tobias. "But now see here!" His manner changed suddenly. "Don't you go and run off to him and say that I told you all this. I cal'late the Endicotts wouldn't be likely to want all the world and Dick's hat band to know they'd lost their money. Ralph's proud—you know he is."

"Oh, that is true," agreed Lorna, displaying much disturbance of mind. "Ralph is the proudest fellow! It's in the Endicott blood. I suppose they would starve before they would tell their dearest friends of the straits they are in."

"I cal'late," agreed the quite unruffled lightkeeper.

"Perhaps that is what has made Ralph so grouchy."

"I shouldn't wonder a mite."

"I—I really can't think what to do," murmured Lorna.

"Oh, sugar! you can't do anything, child. Ralph wouldn't let you help him. He wouldn't borrow money of a girl. Why, he wouldn't let me lend him any," and the lightkeeper nodded his head ponderously.

It was plain that what he had said had made its impression on Lorna Nicholet's mind. She wandered away, deep in thought and forgetting all about Conny Degger.

"I cal'late," muttered Tobias, "I have started something at last. Now, let 'er

simmer!"

CHAPTER XI

THE BLACK SQUALL

Lorna Nicholet was of a joyous heart—a joy-bringer and a joy-giver. She had spent a happy childhood. Miss Ida's firm government had been the very best bringing up the girl could have had, for not only was she of a lightsome disposition, but she was inclined to carry that chief trait of her character to recklessness.

Left to herself, impulse would more often have guided her decisions—both momentous and unimportant—than the really good sense with which she was endowed. She was a charming mixture of infantile trustfulness and downright practicality. She was wont to trust in the good intentions of everybody, yet she often shrewdly evaded pitfalls that girls of her cheerfully optimistic type sometimes get into.

Her happy association with Ralph Endicott caused Lorna to look upon all young men as being like her chum. Because Ralph was chivalrous and a "good fellow," Lorna believed such was the character of all young men. She treated Conway Degger as she always had Ralph. Degger was shrewd enough (or was it because of the warning word Ralph had once given him?) in most instances to pattern his attitude after the example set by the frank and clean-minded Endicott.

Occasionally there were crudities shown in Degger's nature that rather shocked the gently bred Lorna. But she overlooked these lapses on his part, and their companionship was in the main that of two healthy-minded boys, rather than that of a young man and a young woman.

She had insisted upon blaming Ralph Endicott for the determination of their families to force Ralph and herself into an engagement. She felt that if he had "put his foot down like a man" and refused to hear of any such arrangement the Endicotts and the Nicholets, in conclave assembled, would give up the idea. That she had not yet declared in her own household that she scorned Ralph and would not marry him, did not count in her opinion. If Ralph was a real man he would not put such a burden upon her. And then, secretly, she knew her Aunt Ida and her father would take any such declaration on her part very lightly indeed.

"Lorna is very young yet, John," Miss Ida said to Lorna's father, and in the girl's hearing. "Too young to really know her own mind. But surely, when she

throws off this childishness of thought, she must agree with us that there is only one proper course to pursue. Ralph is a splendid boy, and his family is irreproachable."

"He's a good deal like his Uncle Henry, I should say," observed John Nicholet.

Miss Ida bridled, as she frequently did when Henry Endicott was mentioned. Lorna had more than once noted it.

"I should hope Ralph would have some traits of character not patterned upon those of his uncle," she said. "I believe that if Lorna takes Ralph Endicott for a husband, she will do extremely well."

What could a girl say in rejoinder to such calm and over-riding statements? Individuality was not to be considered at all! She must look upon a marriage contract as of more importance to the family than to herself.

"I might as well be a French girl, instead of a real Yankee," she furiously complained. "What did our ancestors come here for? For freedom! And I mean to have my share."

"There, there!" sighed Miss Ida, smiling faintly. "At least, my dear, don't be loud if you do insist on being childish."

What could one do under these circumstances? Run away? Flout her family—and the Endicotts—directly? But Lorna had no place to run away to, and nobody she cared to run away with. Least of all at this time did she have any idea of running away with Conny Degger!

That young man bided his time with admirable composure. If he was deeply enamored of Lorna, he succeeded in hiding the feeling from public view. The girl wanted a male companion to "play with." Beyond having a good time swimming, and boating, and fishing, and following other longshore pursuits, Lorna had no thought. Degger was a patient waiter.

The old lightkeeper's suggestion that Ralph and his family were in financial difficulties gave Lorna certain pause. She had been treating Ralph whenever they met to a mixture of careless comradery and downright snubbing. He could consider himself as being, in her opinion, of small importance. She thought this had begun to make its impression on what she called "His High-Mightiness."

Of late she had caught Ralph looking at her with an expression of countenance that she could not altogether fathom. Was it a look of compassion? And why? Or did it display his secret fear of losing Lorna altogether? The girl never had believed that Ralph Endicott was as much opposed to the determination of the two families to get them married as she herself was. What girl with a proper amount of pride and vanity could have believed such to be the fact?

Tobias Bassett's matchmaking, brought to bear upon Lorna's mind, caused the girl to reconsider Ralph's evident disturbed mental state. If Mr. Henry Endicott had frittered away the family fortune, as Tobias intimated, naturally Ralph's

family would insist more strongly than ever that he marry Lorna.

Upon coming of age Lorna would have a considerable fortune in her own right. This dowry the Endicotts naturally would consider as being the salvation of Ralph's fortunes, if not of the family's. Nor did this thought seem at all shocking to the girl's mind.

The idea of Ralph going away to look for a business opening seemed much more disturbing to Lorna. That an Endicott should be obliged to seek a livelihood in the ordinary marts of trade was a most upsetting thought. She really wished—did Lorna—that she might do something for her old chum in a financial way without thereby pledging her hand to him in marriage.

The effect of all these disturbing thoughts upon her own peace of mind was to be considered. Already her Aunt Ida had emphatically declared it to be Lorna's duty to marry Ralph. If Miss Nicholet knew of the waning fortunes of the Endicotts, would she not be the more insistent that her niece keep faith with Ralph and fulfil the contract so long arranged by their kin?

"My goodness!" sighed Lorna, being sorry for Ralph, yet more sorry for herself, "if it would only enter Aunt Ida's head to marry Professor Endicott. That would be a logical way out of it, and would relieve me. And if Aunt Ida was once in love with Ralph's uncle, why shouldn't she come to the rescue instead of making me the sacrificial offering? Oh, dear!"

Lorna's confidential relations with Ralph, however, were broken. Instead of planning the day's activities with her old chum, it was to Conny Degger she turned for assistance in pleasurably killing the idle hours alongshore.

Degger did nothing quite as well as Ralph—unless his small talk was more amusing. He did possess a fund of amusing chatter; whereas Ralph had been wont to lapse into long spells of silence while he and Lorna were fishing or sailing. Lorna often accused Degger of "talking the fish off their feeding grounds."

Still, the light chatter of her new chum was not altogether unentertaining. She could not expect any other young man to be just like Ralph Endicott. Indeed, she told herself she did not want Conny Degger to be the same sort of man as Ralph.

Now she had a chance to take the lead when they went fishing or boating. She knew infinitely more (thanks to Ralph) about such sports than Degger. Lorna could not, however, manage a boat—not even the lightkeeper's dory—as well as Ralph. No fisherman's son in all Clinkerport was a better sailor of small craft than Ralph Endicott.

So it was that the day came when Lorna (whether she would or no) desired the presence of Ralph instead of Conny with her in the dory off the Twin Rocks. She had ample opportunity on this occasion to compare the two young men.

The weather had been uncertain all day. When Lorna and Conny Degger

came over from the Clay Head and borrowed the lightkeeper's dory, Tobias would surely have warned them against going out had he seen them. But he was taking his daily nap, for his care of the lamp in the tall tower kept him awake a good part of each night.

Gusts of wind were swooping down upon the sea and ruffling it into lurid patches far off shore—certain indication of coming trouble. After the dory was beyond the shelter of the reefs the pleasure seekers saw streaks of driving rain racing across the wave tops, away out on the open sea. But the fish began to bite ravenously.

It was while their luck was so good that Lorna saw suddenly a figure scrambling over the shore-end of the outer reef, and waving an energetic arm to them.

"Now, what does *he* want?" the girl demanded, with no little exasperation.

"Who is it? The skipper?" Conny asked lightly, and without turning his head.

"It's Ralph," she said shortly.

"Oh! Endicott? He is always trying to butt in, isn't he?" suggested Conny, laughing. "Sour grapes, I suppose. Let him swing his arm off. *He* doesn't own this boat."

Lorna giggled. "It's funny," she commented, glancing back at the figure gyrating on the rock. "Ralph doesn't often get so excited. And over what, I wonder."

Neither she nor her companion looked skyward. Over the bay a black mass of cloud had risen and was rolling toward the open sea. Lurid lightnings played upon its edges.

The dory in which the girl and Conny Degger sat was several cable-lengths off the jaws of the reef. It seemed as though they had plenty of clear-way in which to manage the craft if a squall did strike. Neither, however, expected what was threatening from the cloud.

When Ralph, mooning alone alongshore, as had become his wont of late, spied the coming squall and the couple's danger therefrom, there was ample time for the fishers to have got up anchor and gained shelter between the Twin Rocks.

It was several minutes before Ralph realized that Lorna at least was deliberately ignoring his effort to warn her of peril. Or was she so much under Conny's influence that she considered his wisdom in weather matters above that of Ralph?

The latter might be stung in his pride—a vulnerable spot—by such a thought; but the occasion was too serious for him to shake off responsibility by a shrug of his shoulders.

He saw at last that the fishers were determined to yield him no attention. So, turning swiftly, he scrambled back to the sands. At the cove lay his own motorboat, the *Fenique*, the fastest of the small flock of craft moored in the cove. In five minutes he reached the strand, pushed in a skiff, and sculled out to the *Fenique's*

moorings.

Already the oily black mass of cloud had spread over the greater part of Clinkerport Bay. Thunder muttered behind it. The vivid lightnings intermittently lit the edges of the cloud. Behind that screen lurked an electric storm that, when it burst, promised disaster. Any light craft in its path would be as mere culch before a cyclone!

The barren backbones of the two reefs hid the dory on their seaward side from the site of the *Fenique's* moorings. Lorna and Conny might see their danger in season and make for shelter while Ralph was getting his motor-boat out of the harbor. But Endicott must take the risk of this. As the girl and her companion in the dory had refused to heed his warning, Ralph must needs risk his own life.

In spite of the seaworthiness of the lightkeeper's dory, Ralph did not believe Degger was seaman enough to handle the boat in a black squall. On him might rest the burden of the couple's rescue from the tempest that threatened.

He snubbed the skiff's painter to the mooring buoy. The motor-boat was in readiness for immediate use. He cast off the mooring hawser and went forward to turn the wheel. The spark caught the first time he threw the wheel over. The exhaust coughed sharply. Ralph eased on the engine and seized the spokes of the steering wheel as the propeller blades began to revolve.

The *Fenique* swam out into the open cove, and he headed her for the points of the double reef. The mouth of sheltered Clinkerport Bay was filled with racing, foam-crested waves, the slate-hued sides of which were veined with yellow. It was a wicked-looking patch of water into which Ralph steered the motor-boat.

Above the thunder of the breakers on the rocks and the roar of the surf along the shore he could now hear the high whine of the coming squall. The black cloud seemed suddenly to have expanded into a smothering mantle over both shore and sea.

As he steered the motor-boat around the out-thrust rocks, the black squall burst. The dory had not escaped the peril of it. Lorna and Conny had got up the kedge, and now Degger was at the oars tugging vainly to drive the dory shoreward.

"The poor fish!" was Ralph's rather futile comment.

A good boatman would have known instantly that to head into the wind was a perfectly useless undertaking. There was a short mast and a sail lashed under the thwarts. To step the mast and spread a hand's breadth of canvas, so keeping the dory before the wind and to outrun the waves that were already beginning to climb, was the seamanly thing to do. Just as Ralph had feared, Degger was doing what most surely would bring the girl and himself into jeopardy.

"Ought to be a law against fellows like him ever getting into a boat!" muttered Endicott, increasing the speed of his own craft when clear of the point. "He's

lost one boat already. You'd think that would satisfy him. And to lug Lorna along with him——"

Ralph might have been somewhat unfair in this criticism of Degger; but he was much worried for Lorna Nicholet's safety. Under the increasing strokes of the propeller the *Fenique* began fairly to bound over the waves. She shook all through her length when her propeller blades plunged out of the water. She was only "hitting the high spots" when she came into view of the two in the dory.

Lorna screamed in satisfaction at sight of the *Fenique* with Ralph standing in her cockpit. It was a cheering sight.

But Conny missed his stroke as he glared over his shoulder to see the approaching rescuer. A wave slapped aboard the dory, half filled it, and dragged one of the oars from Degger's hand.

Lorna screamed again, this time in actual fear. She was waist deep in the sea that had come inboard. Degger showed no white feather, although he was awkward in getting into the stern with the remaining oar. The dory had begun to swing broadside to the bursting seas, and their situation was indeed perilous.

Ralph shouted a command that the two in the dory did not hear. Degger knew of but one thing to do. He saw the dory in danger of being swamped in the trough between two waves, and he plunged the oar into the sea to right her. The next instant another wave came inboard, the impact of it all but throwing him on his face in the bottom of the boat.

The dory began to settle under this weight of water. Their submersion seemed to be at hand.

CHAPTER XII

TROUBLED WATERS

Each succeeding wave was likely to slop over the gunwale and add to the cargo of salt water already shipped by the dory. She was squattering down like a wounded duck, and seemingly quite as helpless.

Degger was able only to cling to the steering oar, and that was a most futile thing to do. Lorna seized the bailer and threw the water out as fast as she could. But one person could not bail as fast as the sea came inboard.

The *Fenique*, meeting the cross-seas as Ralph Endicott steered her down upon the wallowing dory, rolled enormously, but her owner knew the craft's sea-

worthiness. Her water-tight compartments, bow and stern, would keep her afloat even if the cockpit filled and she became quite unmanageable.

The dory was fairly water-logged. That indeed was the salvation for the moment of her two passengers. The dory would not turn turtle while it swam so low in the sea.

Lorna was at last thoroughly frightened. It was not that she had never been in equal peril. Once, when they were half-grown, she and Ralph had been swept out to sea in a never-to-be-forgotten tempest, and had taken refuge upon the Quail Shoal lightship. That was an occasion to be remembered in very truth!

But the girl had not experienced at that time this terrible sinking feeling of helplessness that she now endured. It was born in her mind that it had been her perfect trust in Ralph Endicott that had buoyed her up on those other occasions when they were in peril together. She felt her own helplessness at the present time, and in Conny Degger's face she marked nothing but an equal fear. Degger possessed none of Ralph's initiative nor any degree of his cool courage.

She was face to face with death. She could not swim to the shore in such a sea as this. Indeed, no swimmer could live in it. If Ralph in his motor-boat did not overtake them soon, Lorna believed there was little hope for Degger and herself.

She continued to bail desperately. The water in the boat rose against her breast and almost choked her. The chill of it made her gasp. Dimly she saw Degger struggling with the oar. She looked away at the plunging *Fenique* with Ralph standing amidships and clinging to the wheel.

"Ralph! Oh, Ralph!" she cried aloud.

The words were driven back into her throat by the gale. Degger's wildly glaring eyes betrayed his complete panic. His very soul had turned to water. It was mere muscular reaction—like that of a dead man—that caused him to cling to the oar. He was positively transfixed with terror.

The motor-boat plunged awkwardly toward the water-logged dory. Its bow seemed aimed to ram the smaller craft amidships. The girl stopped bailing.

If the motor-boat plunged upon them, what could save the two in the dory? Lorna stretched her arms out to Ralph, Conny Degger released the oar, ashen-faced and trembling.

Ralph's voice (how full and unshaken it seemed!) came down the wind to them:

"Stand by to grab the rail! Look out for yourself, Degger!"

He threw the steering wheel over and lashed the spokes to hold it steady. As the *Fenique's* bow swerved off from the floundering dory, Ralph sprang upon the roof of the cabin and flung himself along its slippery surface to reach Lorna's out-stretched hands.

"Hold hard, Lorna!" he shouted.

The motor-boat slid past the dory. Ralph fairly snatched the girl out of it.

Astern he heard an awful cry. Hugging Lorna tightly in the embrace of his right arm, Ralph looked back.

Conny Degger had missed the *Fenique's* rail, but he had gripped the bight of a rope trailing overboard. He was being towed in the sea; dragged through the bursting waves rather than over them. His precarious situation was not to be derided.

A curling sea toppled over their heads and fell, a smashing weight, upon the *Fenique.* The motor-boat staggered under the impact of the blow. The cockpit was awash as Ralph stumbled down into it with Lorna in his arms.

The girl struggled out of his grasp. She seized the rail, gripping it with both hands.

"Conny! Save him!" she shrieked.

At this juncture her anxiety for Degger seemed to mark a deeper interest than Ralph had suspected she felt for the man.

But Ralph had first their ultimate safety to think of. He leaped for the wheel and relieved the strain under which the *Fenique* labored. He payed off carefully until the motor-boat began to ride the billows more buoyantly.

When he stoppered the wheel again and turned to aid Degger, Lorna was creeping aft with the evident intent of laying hold of the rope to which the man clung. But she did not possess the strength to drag him inboard.

Ralph set her aside with a fending arm and seized the rope. With a long haul and a heave, he brought the gasping Degger under the rail of the motor-boat.

As the craft rolled, Ralph leaned over the rail and seized the half drowned Degger just as the latter's grip slipped from the rope. While the rail dipped to the running sea the rescuer heaved him in-board.

Then Ralph leaped back to the wheel and righted the motor-boat again. When she was once more headed right, flying ahead of the blast, he glanced over his shoulder. Lorna was on her knees in the bottom of the boat with Conny Degger's head in her lap. The tableau was somewhat startling.

Of course, if she really cared for the fellow——

Then what Tobias Bassett had said about its being necessary for Lorna to marry a wealthy man flashed into Ralph's mind. Degger certainly was not wealthy. Ralph had reason to know this to be a fact.

If the Nicholets were in financial straits and looked to Lorna to make a money marriage, the girl had picked the wrong partner in her match-making.

Ralph did not feel any scorn for Lorna in this supposition. He only pitied her. Determined as she was not to marry Ralph, Endicott knew she must be forced by family pressure to accept the next best marriageable possibility. But he was sure Lorna was misinformed regarding Degger.

Of course, the latter believed the Nicholets to be wealthy. He was, Ralph was confident, nothing more nor less than a fortune hunter. That his old friend and this Degger were mutually mistaken in each other's financial affairs was not a situation from which Ralph could extract any amusement. Not at all! He hated to see Lorna waste any of her thought—perhaps a measure of her confidence—upon such a character as Degger.

"She has gone through the wood and picked up a crooked stick, after all," Ralph reflected, while maneuvering the motor-boat. "I didn't think she was such a little fool!"

There was some bitterness in this expression of his thought. Although he had no wish to marry Lorna (or so he almost hourly told himself) Ralph Endicott felt a certain proprietorship in the girl because of their years of intimacy. Had she been his sister he believed he would have felt the same.

When Degger learned that Lorna would have no dowry, he would leave her flat. He was not a fellow to really fall in love with any girl. He was too much in love with himself, was Conny Degger.

Ralph looked around again. The man was recovering, and Lorna had drawn away from him. She was saturated as well as Degger, and Ralph saw now that she shook with the cold.

"Come here, Lorna, and hold the wheel. Just as she is. There! I'll get you something to put on."

Ralph drew out his keys and unlocked the cabin door. He found a heavy pilot-cloth coat and made the girl put it on.

"If Degger wants anything let him look around for it," Ralph said, not altogether graciously.

Lorna flashed him an inquiring glance from under her wet curls. Was it possible that he was showing jealousy of Conny Degger? In spite of their perilous position, she was amused by this suggestion.

That they were by no means out of danger was evident. The sea was running high, the wind still blew, and driving rain flattened the tops of the waves and beat upon the voyagers on the *Fenique* most viciously.

The motor-boat was still running before the gale. Seaworthy as she was, Ralph did not dare put back for the harbor's mouth. Lower Trillion was the nearest port they could hope to make in safety.

It was too stuffy and uncomfortable in the low cabin to attract the girl. Besides, one felt safer outside with the seas running as they were.

She looked at Conny Degger's face again. Its expression declared so plainly his panic that she turned her gaze away quickly. Never again, Lorna told herself, would she be able to look at that young man without remembering his cowardice.

Ralph however did not understand this. He had mistaken the natural pity

the girl showed Degger for a much more tender feeling.

Endicott had no suspicion that Lorna had been playing Degger all the time for the express purpose of making Ralph himself feel slighted. It wickedly delighted the girl to feel that she was making her old chum jealous.

This possibility Ralph would not have admitted in any case. Professor Henry Endicott and the other members of his family were constantly hinting at a contract between Ralph and Lorna. Of late more than a little had been said to him regarding the girl's association with this Degger. Why did Ralph not put a stop to it, they inquired.

Although he denied to himself that he felt any jealousy, he had begun to believe that it was his duty to separate Conny and Lorna. He was not so lacking in humane instincts as to wish that Conny had lost his grip on the rope when he was overboard so that the difficulty would have been quite satisfactorily settled; and yet the thought flashed into his mind.

As Ralph conned the course of the plunging *Fenique* he likewise conned the problem of how to get rid of Conway Degger without inspiring in Lorna's breast a greater liking for the fellow than he believed she already sustained.

They raised the Lower Trillion life-saving station and drove on for the mouth of the harbor. A can buoy marked the channel and a deep-mouthed bell in a bracket on the end of the stone pier tolled intermittently. Ralph skilfully steered into the calm pool behind this breakwater.

"Some traveling," he observed, when he had shut off the engine and looked at his watch. "Forty-five minutes from the light. The old tub never made better time, even in a flat calm."

"Are we safe at last?" gasped Degger, sitting up.

"Just as safe as though you were at home and in bed," rejoined Ralph rather bruskly.

"What shall I do?" Lorna asked. "I look a fright."

"Why, Miss Lorna," Conny said, quickly regaining his spirits, "you'll have time enough to dry your things in the cabin. We'll be here for hours, I suppose."

"*We* may," Ralph said quickly. "But Lorna can go home by land. I'll find somebody with a flivver to take her up to Clay Head."

"Oh!" exclaimed Degger. "Then I guess I'll go with her."

"Guess again," Ralph rejoined. "I need you."

"What's that?" ejaculated the other.

"We'll start back in the *Fenique* just as soon as the wind hauls off a little. She's fluttering now."

"Do you think for one moment that I would risk my life outside in this dinky little craft again unless it is calm? I guess all these motor-boats are alike—as unsafe as they can be!"

"Oh, I'll not start back for the light until all danger is over," Ralph told him quietly. "The clouds are breaking. In a couple of hours it may be all right. And we must pick up Tobias's dory and tow it in."

"Of course!" Lorna said cheerfully. "I had forgotten that."

"Say!" exclaimed Degger loudly, "the skipper's dory can drift to the Bahamas and back again, as far as I am concerned. I wouldn't trust myself outside again to-day——"

"Then who will pay Tobias for his boat?" demanded Ralph sharply.

Lorna had been about to suggest this very point—although more diplomatically—when Ralph blurted out his question. The scorn expressed on his face and the fire in his eyes stirred her to some defense of Degger's selfishness.

"Of course *I* will pay Mr. Bassett," she said decisively. "It is my fault that we lost the dory. I asked Conny to take me out in it. I will pay Mr. Bassett if it is lost."

"It isn't going to be lost if I can help it," growled Ralph. "You can't sink one of those dories very easily. I believe I can find it, if we go back before night. Tobias is fond of that boat, too."

"Well, find it, if you are so set on doing so," snarled Degger. "I refuse to risk my life."

"You are a lot keener on saving your life than anybody else, I imagine," Ralph rejoined scornfully. "I shall need somebody to help when I catch the dory, and you're elected."

"You can't bully me, Endicott!" cried the other. "I don't like your manner, anyway."

"That makes me sad," drawled Ralph. "I'm going to weep over that—when I find time. But we'll have a try for Tobias's dory first."

"I won't go with you. You can't make me. I will accompany Miss Lorna."

"We'll see about that," was Ralph's rejoinder. He turned to the girl.

"I'll signal the station. Perhaps Zeke Bassett can get off, and he will take you up in his car. He can find a boat to take you ashore. I don't want to beach the *Fenique*."

"That's all right, Endicott. You need not bother about Miss Lorna," put in Degger. "I'll attend to her transportation to Twin Rocks."

Lorna had hesitated to speak while the young men quarreled. Slowly however her expression of countenance had hardened. She turned from Degger and asked Ralph abruptly:

"Do you really think you can find the dory? Will it be afloat so long?"

"Oh, yes. Hard work to sink one of those boats. With somebody to help me I'm almost sure to recover it."

"You needn't look to me to help you," sneered Degger.

"I'll go back with you," Lorna said quickly. "I can manage the *Fenique* while

you fish for the dory."

"Miss Lorna! You won't think of such a thing!" Degger cried.

She ignored him.

"I'll go below and light a fire, Ralph. My things will be dry in an hour. You put on this coat, or you'll catch cold," and she slipped out of the pilot-coat.

"Not me," said Ralph easily. "Let Degger put it on. He'll be cold riding up to the light in that open car of Zeke's."

Lorna dropped the coat on the bench and without looking again at Degger opened the cabin door and slipped below. Degger's face displayed his chagrin. Ralph chuckled audibly, turned his back on the fellow, too, and shouted shoreward.

The coming of the *Fenique* had been marked by the lookout in the cupola of the life-saving station, and the very member of the crew of whom Ralph had spoken, Zeke Bassett, now appeared upon the sands.

"Got your car handy, Mr. Bassett?" called Ralph. "Got a passenger for you to take to the Twin Rocks Light—and beyond."

"Sure, I'll take him," was Bassett's reply, seeing that Ralph indicated Degger. "Got enough of the briny, has he? I'll come right out in Sam's skiff for him. You had some weather comin' down, didn't you, Mr. Endicott?"

"'Some weather' is right," agreed Ralph. "But she's clearing now, don't you think?"

"Sure," said the surfman. "Them black squalls don't really amount to nothin'—after they are over."

Ralph turned to Degger again. The fellow was recovering a measure of his usual confidence. He put on a somewhat uncertain smile.

"If you all think the trouble is over, I don't know but I might go back with you after all."

"I *do* know that you won't!" Ralph retorted. "You get into that skiff, Degger, when Bassett comes out for you."

"Say! who are you bullying, I'd like to know?"

"I'm telling you. I did pick you out of the sea, but I don't have to keep you aboard here any longer than I wish to. You'll go ashore now."

"Oh, yes! That is the kind of fellow you are," snarled Degger. "You've had it in for me ever since I borrowed some of your loose change back there at Cambridge. I haven't forgotten it—don't think!"

"I thought you had," was Ralph's mild sarcasm.

That did not even cause Conway Degger to blush. He still spoke heatedly. "I presume you expect me to fall down and worship you for saving my life."

"Not *you*," sighed Ralph. "Gratitude I am sure is not your besetting sin."

"Oh, you're only jealous," sneered the other. "Anybody can see that. And

you think you'll have a better time alone with Lorva aboard than you would if I went back to the light with you."

Ralph started for him. Then he halted, holding himself in. If there was a fight here on board the motor-boat Lorna must surely be aware of it. He bent on Conway Degger a look that warned him that he had gone far enough.

"I know just the sort of scamp you are, Degger," he said in a low voice. "I should not have let you hang around as you have. Your rep at college was enough."

"How about your own?" sneered Degger. "There was that Cora Devine—how about *her*?"

"Well, how about her?" rejoined Ralph, with unmoved countenance.

"You try to interfere in my affairs," Degger said furiously, "and somebody will hear all about that Devine girl—believe me!"

"I don't just get you, Degger," Ralph returned calmly. "But if for no other reason, that threat would make me promise to interfere—and to some purpose."

"You——"

"Listen!" commanded Ralph, with a gesture that silenced the oath on Degger's lips. "When Zeke Bassett takes you as far as the Twin Rocks Light, you pack your grip and go on with him to Clinkerport. I don't care how far you travel beyond Clinkerport. But if you are still at the Light when I get back there, I'll thrash you out of your skin! Believe me, Degger, I mean it. I hope you will be unwise enough to wait for me at the Light. You'll be glad enough to go after I give you what you are suffering for."

He turned to catch the loop of the painter Bassett tossed him, and drew the skiff alongside the motorboat. Degger did not even hesitate. He stepped down into the small boat, shaking with the cold, if not with fear. He scorned Ralph's pilot-coat. The surfman grinned up at Ralph, nodded, and pulled back to the strand.

Ralph Endicott had taken the bit in his teeth. He was determined to run certain matters his way from this time on!

CHAPTER XIII

CROSS PURPOSES

An odor of coffee was wafted through the cracks around the cabin door. In a little while Lorna called him.

"I've made a hot drink, Ralph," she said. "Just as soon as I get my clothing dry you must come down and change."

"Thanks, Lorna," Endicott said, accepting the cup of coffee. "But I don't need to. I didn't take a header into the briny as you did. You'd better put on my oilskins. Your dress won't be fit to wear."

He had removed his shoes and socks and rolled up the legs of his trousers. In this free-and-easy costume he could the better get about the wet boat. He swabbed out the cockpit and set the waterproof covered cushions on their edges to dry. He wiped off the machinery with a handful of waste, and tried the spark. The mechanism of the *Fenique* seemed to have suffered but little from the battering of the heavy seas.

The clouds scattered quickly. The sun appeared again, low hung in the west and of a golden-red—prophesying that old weather-wise doggerel:

"Red at night
Sailors' delight."

The slate-colored seas outside the harbor still ran high, but they heaved now without breaking into foam. Their rumbling thunder against the breakwater was more subdued; no longer did the fierce insistence of the black squall mark the sound of the surf. The brief tempest had winged its way out to sea.

"Shall we start soon, Ralph?" asked Lorna, appearing from the cubby in the mannish apparel he had suggested.

"If you are not afraid that it is still too rough."

"Nonsense! I'm not afraid with *you*," she said with a frankness that secretly pleased him. She seemed quite unconscious that her words marked a comparison of Conway Degger and Ralph. She added: "The *Fenique* is a good boat."

"We'll try it, then," Ralph said cheerfully and without looking directly at her.

But she was worth looking at! With her glossy curls banded with one of Ralph's old neckties that she had found below, her dark and glowing face was more piquant than usual. The oilskins swathing her figure made it seem veritably boyish.

She, too, was barefooted, and her tiny, high-arched feet were as white as milk. Ralph looked at them shyly; but Lorna seemed quite unconscious of his scrutiny.

They did not speak of Conway Degger. Yet Ralph thought—it was a poignant flash in his mind—that the girl had been just as unconsciously frank with Degger as she was with him. Was she not too old now to play about with men, like the little tomboy she was wont to be?

Never until Degger had come into their life had this thought ruffled Ralph's tranquillity. Surely Lorna Nicholet was a woman grown. She should leave off childish things.

Yet she was such a bewitching morsel of a girl! Ralph moved nervously. He cast another glance at those wondrously white, blue-veined insteps.

She was so slim, yet perfectly formed! The ankles sticking out of the rolled-up legs of the oilcloth trousers were wonderfully sculptured. She sat on the bench with her ankles crossed before her, for all the world like a thoughtless boy. Nevertheless her sex-charm took hold upon Ralph Endicott's senses as it never had before. "Why," he told himself, "what a sweet wife Lorna would be for the man who wooed and won her!" It was sacrilege for a fellow of Conny Degger's kind to be accorded even the most innocent association with her!

"She's nothing but a child in thought," Ralph told himself. "She's had too much freedom. Or have I grown up in this last year while she has remained just what she looks to be—a little, winsome child?"

Ralph Endicott should have looked twice, perhaps. As he turned determinedly away the girl shot him a roguish glance from under her tumbled curls. Then she drew in the tiny feet, and the voluminous trouser-legs fell over and hid them.

Ralph did not understand the new feelings stirring within him. Without another word or glance he started the engine and steered the motor-boat for the narrow entrance to Lower Trillion Harbor.

The sea was extremely choppy at the harbor mouth. The motor-boat danced about, her propeller wiggling wildly out of the water more than half the time. But Lorna expressed no perturbation. She only clung to the rail with both hands, and when a billow chanced to break and dash a bucket of water over her, she laughed aloud.

"Plucky kid!" thought Ralph with pride. "There never was a girl to beat her—never!"

Yet he had by no means forgotten how unkindly she had treated him. There was that time back there in the late winter when they had been cast upon the hospitality of the lightkeeper and his sister. Ralph could not overlook that occasion.

"If she thinks she can pick me up and throw me away again, like an old glove and just as she pleases, she's a lot mistaken," the young man told himself. "I believe Lorna is a born flirt."

He could not really harden his heart toward his little chum. But he told himself he was not blind to her faults. He had always excused her waywardness, even of late. And now what Tobias had said about the Nicholets' financial trouble made Ralph feel even more consideration for the girl.

Of course Miss Ida and John Nicholet were particularly desirous that Lorna

should marry Ralph, especially in view of the family's misfortune. And if Ralph did not marry her the Nicholets might make it very unpleasant for Lorna.

"I'll say they will," sighed Ralph. "She doesn't know about their poverty, poor girl. They are covering it up all right. But it is going to put us both in a mighty tight corner. Lorna can't marry a poor man in any case. Why! that is preposterous to consider even. But if she doesn't favor me—and heaven knows she doesn't—how will she ever square it with her family? They have never given her a chance to meet the right chaps.

"Great grief! Do I want to marry Lorna or not? I wonder!"

He cast another glance at her over his shoulder. She still sat on the bench. She had shaken the curls over her face, and her red lips were pursed in a most adorable pout.

Ralph sighed hugely, shrugged his shoulders, and looked forward again. It certainly was a puzzle!

Suddenly he saw something that brought a cry from his lips. Lorna jumped up and ran to him, clinging to his arm and pressing close against him as she looked over his shoulder.

"Oh! do you see it, Ralph?" she cried.

He pointed. The dory heaved into view again on another billow—a dark patch upon the slate-colored sea.

"Can we catch it?" breathed Lorna in his ear, a curl brushing his flushing cheek.

"To be sure," and he moved aside. "You take hold here. She doesn't kick much. Steady now!"

"Oh!" she pouted, "I can manage the old wheel well enough," and she crowded in beside him.

She had rolled up the sleeves of his storm jacket, and her little brown hands gripped the wheelspokes in a most capable fashion. Ralph stepped back and allowed her to take his place. He grew cool again and grinned to himself. She certainly was one plucky girl!

He had no idea that he had overlooked a chance that perhaps would never be offered to him again.

He got a bucket from below and then coiled down a length of halyard and held the end of it in readiness as Lorna brought the *Fenique* rubbing alongside the wallowing dory.

Ralph went over the side, carrying the rope and bucket with him and stood knee deep in water in the dory's bottom. He bent on the line and gestured to the girl to bear off so as to drag the dory astern of the motor-boat. Then he went to work to bail out with the bucket.

This was a hard fight at first, for the waves were still boisterous. Every now

and then one broke over the dory and came near to filling it as full as it was when Ralph got aboard.

But the young fellow persevered. If he possessed one characteristic stronger than another, it was stubbornness. At this juncture it proved to be a virtue. He plied the bucket steadily, and at last lowered the water in the dory so that he could afford to take breath.

"Good boy, Ralphie," shouted Lorna, down wind, and he looked up to see her elfin face all asmile again for him. He waved his hand cheerily. "Shall I tune her up a little?" she asked.

"Little at a time, Kid! That's the boy!"

He had spoken to her that way ten years before when they were in the middle of some adventurous escapade. Lorna flushed and turned away her face again. More than a pout expressed her vexation now. Ralph did not show a proper appreciation of her "grown-upness." She had been for the moment too kind to him!

So after that, and when he had bailed the dory completely and had come inboard, Lorna snubbed him. Her fluctuating attitude certainly puzzled the young man.

"Now what have I done?" he secretly wondered.

But as she left the wheel to him without speaking and went to sit down alone in the stern of the *Fenique*, he did not urge conversation upon her. They sailed into Clinkerport Bay, and so around to the cove beside the lighthouse, both about as cheerful as had been their wont when together during the past few weeks.

Tobias came down to the shore to hail them.

"I give it as my opinion," the lightkeeper said, "that you sandpipers air all lackin' in good sense. 'Tis a mystery to me how you come to get raised to the age you be without getting drowned a dozen times over!"

"I was born to be hung," Ralph told him. "The sea isn't wet enough to drown me."

"But you've no business riskin' Lorny's life in your tom-fool v'y'ges."

Ralph did not even bother to deny the lightkeeper's charge. He snubbed the motor-boat to the mooring buoy and then sculled Lorna ashore in the dory. She still wore his oilskins and was bare-footed, but carried her dress over her arm.

"I'll run up to the light to dress," she said. "In any case I must see Mr. Degger for a moment."

[image]

"I'll run up to the light to dress," she said.

"Your eyesight will have to be pretty average good, then," drawled Tobias.

"Why?" she asked, hesitating.

"He's left."

"Why, he was with us down at Lower Trillion!"

"Ya-as. I know. He come back up here with Zeke in the automobile, changed his clothes, packed his sea chist, and went on with Zeke to Clinkerport. Heppy's fair put out. She'd made a heap of fishballs for supper. Cal'late you an' Ralph better stop an' help us eat 'em, Lorny."

"Thank you. As Mr. Degger has gone I will go home immediately," the girl said. "Good evening, Mr. Bassett." She did not even cast a scornful glance at Ralph.

"Oh, sugar!" was Tobias's comment.

CHAPTER XIV

A VARIETY OF HAPPENINGS

Ralph remained at the lighthouse and did justice to the fishcakes. Miss Heppy was "all in a stew," as Tobias said, over the sudden departure of the boarder.

"I'm fair troubled that he wasn't satisfied with our table," the good woman said. "Fishballs and brown loaf and clam chowder and johnnycake and baked beans Saturday night and Sundays, is pretty tryin', I do allow, to them as ain't used to it. We never do have a piece of fresh meat."

"Oh, sugar!" chuckled Tobias. "Don't belittle your fodder, Heppy. You air a mighty good cook as fur as you go. If you had all kinds of fancy doo-dads you wouldn't know how to cook 'em, you know you wouldn't."

"What do you s'pose cookbooks was made for, Tobias Bassett?" demanded Miss Heppy.

"I cal'late they make good pipe-lights," rejoined her brother, suiting his action to his word as he stood at the mantel after supper and rolled himself a spill of a page of the culinary guide in question. "Come, Ralph, le's go up and see if the light is burning bright. 'You in your small corner, an' I in mine.' That allus seemed a cheerful sort o' hymn to me.

"Huh!" he added. "Got your own little packet of coffin-nails? That Degger feller was always havin' one o' them things stuck in a corner of his mouth."

Ralph promptly threw away the cigarette and filled his pipe from Tobias's sack of tobacco. The lightkeeper led the way, chuckling. When they reached the

lamp room the old man turned a curious eye on his young friend and bluntly demanded:

"Tell us all about it, Ralphie. I see the mention of our ex-boarder stirred you up. What made him in such a hurry to leave us?"

"Don't tell Miss Heppy," begged Ralph, "but I guess it is my fault that she's lost her boarder."

"You ought to have a leather medal for bringing it about," declared Tobias. "I certain sure was glad to see him go. What happened? He and Lorny got out in my boat while I was asleep. I can't be about and stirrin' to watch the weather for 'em *all* the time."

Ralph briefly narrated the adventure while Tobias listened, puffing at his pipe and nodding his head.

"I cal'late Lorny's got something to thank you for, then?" he suggested.

Ralph laughed harshly.

"You saw how she acted when we came ashore. Did she seem overpoweringly grateful?"

"Oh, sugar!" chuckled Tobias. "What chance did you give her to fall on your neck and tell you how much she thought of you?"

"Now, Tobias Bassett! I don't want any girl to fall on my neck. Least of all Lorna Nicholet."

"Ain't ready yet to sacrifice yourself' for the good of her family?"

"I won't see a fellow like Conway Degger fool her," growled Ralph. "I will break up his game all right. But I tell you Lorna would not marry me on a bet."

"Oh, sugar! She's something of a sport, Lorny is. I cal'late you ain't ever made her that proposition?"

"Really, I don't have to wait for a ton of coal to fall on me to take a hint," Ralph said, but looking away from the amused lightkeeper.

"No? I dunno 'bout that," muttered Tobias, who found his matchmaking with this rather dense young fellow somewhat uphill work. "I'd like to see Lorny get a good fellow with as much money as you've got, Ralph, and almost as much sense."

"Huh!"

"And that Degger don't fill the bill."

"If he doesn't let her alone——"

"Yep. That's all right. But in removing him from the scene you don't give Lorny no other play-toy. And she's been used to having a chap at her beck an' call all of the time. You know that."

"But, Tobias! She doesn't want me. She has shown plainly enough that she cares nothing for me."

"Oh, sugar! I don't see how it is that you young fellers understand so little about womenfolks."

"To hear you talk! And you not even married!"

"That's why," rejoined Tobias slyly. "I cal'late I understand 'em too well. Now, s'posin' Lorna was a gal you'd just met and you was stuck on her? S'posin' you wanted to make a good impression on her—eh? How would you go about it? S'posin' you was really fallin' in love with Lorny?"

Ralph slowly flushed. The smoke from his pipe choked him—or seemed to. He coughed and turned from Tobias again.

Actually he was seeing in his mind's vision a tiny, milk-white, blue-veined foot sticking out of the leg of a pair of oilcloth overalls.

But Lorna Nicholet possessed dignity, too. Nor did she have always to wait on the ruffling of her temper to show it.

Miss Ida chanced to suffer an infrequent headache on this evening and there were guests at dinner, although it was quite an informal affair. An hour after she had run barefooted and in Ralph's suit of oilskins, along the beach and up the path to the house on Clay Head, Lorna, in a perfect dinner toilet, slipped into the seat at the head of the table after her father and his guests were seated.

There are raveled edges at every dinner to be hemmed. The perfectly served meal is usually the one over which the hostess has worried her nerves to the raw. There was a new maid—of the usual kind one gets at the seashore—and Lorna was obliged to cover her deficiencies and carry on at the same time a spirited conversation with the women guests.

The men were seated at her father's end of the table, and Lorna sensed early in the meal that this was a semi-business gathering. The wives had been brought along to make the occasion seem less like a board-room wrangle.

Now and then Lorna heard a few words of the business discussion that went steadily on from cherry-stone clams to black coffee, like an organ accompaniment to the chatter of feminine voices.

"But we can't count on Endicott."

"What is the matter with the fellow? He was strong for the proposition a year ago."

"Usually Henry Endicott will at least listen to plans for a public improvement."

"Wrapped in some new invention, like enough."

"Those experiments of his must cost him a pretty penny."

"And they bring in no dividends," was the conclusion of John Nicholet.

It was these observations coming to her ear that caused Lorna to seek her father in his den after the guests were gone. She rustled in and perched herself upon the broad arm of his smoking chair and set, as usual, a moist kiss upon the

apex of his bald crown.

"A very satisfactory evening—yes, very satisfactory," said John Nicholet. "Let me see. Where was your aunt, child?"

"Headache, daddy. I believe that is more often than not a feminine excuse for escaping a dry-as-dust dinner. I don't blame Aunt Ida. I do think that your business friends' wives are the most unentertaining people!"

"Bless us! Are they? I had no idea. Really, pet, it was a business conference."

"So I gathered," Lorna said. "What was it all about, daddy?"

"Just a scheme for making two dollars grow where only one grew before. And I think it will succeed."

"Without Professor Endicott's cooperation?" she asked.

"Bless us! Do you—ah, you 'listened in,' rogue!" he accused, shaking an admonishing finger at her. "Keep a still tongue about it, please, for the present."

"Surely. But I was interested——"

"Of course. Of course," said her father. "Especially when you heard the name of Endicott. If your Ralph had any money of his own (which he hasn't, for it is all tied up in trust funds, I understand) I would let him in on this instead of his Uncle Henry."

Lorna had gone red and looked vexed at his mention of "her Ralph." But she was still curious.

"I suppose Professor Endicott really manages the whole Endicott estate, daddy?"

"Oh, yes. It is all in his hands. And I do not understand when we offer him such a bang-up investment why he doesn't come in."

"Could it be possible that he is short of funds, daddy?"

"Of ready cash, you mean? Why, I have always understood that the Endicott securities were so placed that they brought in a continual stream of dividends. Conservative in the extreme, yet safe investments. Otherwise, how has Henry managed to run that family in such an extravagant way and to pour money into his experiments as well?"

"Couldn't that be the very reason why he does not enter into this investment that you have offered him?" ventured Lorna. "Perhaps the Endicott fortune is depleted to such an extent that he has no surplus for investment."

"Bless us! Do you know that to be a fact, daughter?"

"I do not know anything about it. It may be only gossip. But it is reported that Professor Endicott has wasted the family fortune."

"Dear me! You don't mean that, Lorna? That would be a catastrophe. What does Ralph say about it?"

"I have never spoken to Ralph about such matters," said Lorna, a little stiffly.

"No, no. I presume not. Such a sordid thing as money does not interest

you youngsters. And in any case, if Ralph didn't have a penny to bless himself with, we can be thankful that your money is well placed and you and he need not worry."

Lorna got off the arm of the chair quickly. She stamped her foot.

"Daddy, I tell you I have no intention of marrying Ralph Endicott!"

"Bless us!" gasped her father. "If Henry has made ducks and drakes of their money and Ralph hasn't a penny, who will marry the boy if you don't?"

Amos Pickering waved a flabby hand to attract the attention of the lightkeeper while yet the monster-headed horse was a long way from Miss Heppy's flower-beds where Tobias was sunning himself with his pipe.

"Here comes the *Daily Bladder*," remarked Tobias, speaking to his sister, who was inside the lighthouse. "Now we'll l'arn whose punkin is the biggest."

He arose slowly from his seat and went down the sandy slope to the road. Amos had a paper for the lightkeeper, but he was bursting with news himself.

"Ye ain't got no boarder no more, I understand, Tobias," the rural mail carrier began.

"You understand correct," agreed Tobias, biting on his pipe stem. "An' I give it as my opinion that Heppy maybe just about broke even on his board—if anybody should drive up and ax ye, Amos."

But the mail carrier brushed this financial consideration aside. There was the canker of gossip eating on his inquiring mind, and he blurted out the subject at once:

"I didn't just know whether you run that feller out, Tobe, or whether 'twas his fight with Ralph Endicott that sent him kitin'."

"His fight with Ralph?" questioned Tobias with pursed lips. "Did they fight?"

"So I'm told. Didn't you hear about it?" asked the eager Amos.

"Not as I know of."

"Why, so they tell me down to Little Trillion. Over that Nicholet gal. You know, Tobias, she's been playin' fast and loose with them two fellers all summer."

"No. I didn't know that, neither," declared the lightkeeper, puffing more rapidly on his pipe.

"Wal, now, you know, Tobe, she's got them two fellers on her string. It come to a head, they tell me, an' Endicott licked this Degger to a fare-ye-well, put him ashore at the Lower Trillion life saving station, and sailed away with the gal on that motor-boat of his'n. They tell me they was gone all night, nobody knows where—heh?"

For Tobias had dropped his pipe and his eyes suddenly blazed.

"I know all about that, Amos," he said sternly.

"Ye do? I thought ye didn't."

"I know it ain't so. Ralph went out after Lorna and that Degger in his motor-boat when they was in danger of being drowned as dead as Pharaoh's hosts. He put Degger ashore at Lower Trillion 'cause the feller was scare't. He brought Lorna back here less'n an hour after Degger arrived in Zeke Bassett's car. That's the truth on it. Who's tellin' this dirty story about town, anyway?"

"Wal, now, Tobias, mebbe it is nothin' but a pack o' lies. They was a-tellin' of it at the post-office. That Degger is stoppin' at the Inn. He an' a feller named Lon Burtwell. Mebbe you've seed him about town, off an' on, this summer?"

"Go on," said Tobias, ruefully scrutinizing the broken pipe he had picked up.

"An' they said that Degger said he'd had a row with Endicott. He said Endicott had sailed away with the gal. Intimated mebbe they'd *e*-loped. Degger said Endicott did just that with another gal once, when he was at college. There was a scandal about it."

"And I can see there's some scandal about this," Tobias rejoined reflectively. "Wal, Amos, dates is dates, and you can't fool the clock. I met Ralph and Lorny when they come ashore, and it was just in the shanks of the evening, 'fore supper.

"I don't reckon Ralph ever laid his hand on that Degger yet; but if he hears this story I shouldn't be surprised if there was a ruction. I knowed that Degger didn't have no more morals than a clam worm."

CHAPTER XV

DECISIVE ACTION

It was impossible that such a story should be wafted about the community without reaching Ralph Endicott's ears. Lorna might never hear it, but Ralph's association with the longshore folk was much closer than that of most of the dwellers on Clay Head.

In spite of the Endicott pride and a large measure of dignity for so young a man—which Lorna sometimes scoffed at—Ralph was not considered at all "stuck up" by the natives. He was quite at home on fishing smack or clam flat. He could hold his own in any work or rough sport with the younger men of Clinkerport. And, in addition, he could be depended on at any time to lend a hand.

For this very trait of which fellows of Degger's kidney had taken advantage at college, Clinkerport folk respected him. And the individual who brought to

Ralph the unkind gossip that the mail carrier had repeated to Tobias o' the Light, thought he was doing Ralph a favor.

"'Course, we don't b'lieve nothing like that of you and Miss Nicholet," the gossip-laden tongue concluded. "And Amos Pickering says that Tobias Bassett says that you an' the gal was back at the Light from Lower Trillion an hour after Degger got back.

"But you know how such stories spread. The truth's a cripple while a lie wears the seven-leagued boots! An' this Degger does say that you had trouble over another gal up there where you went to college——"

"Where is Degger keeping himself?" demanded Ralph, breaking into his informant's story at this point.

"Why, he an' Lon Burtwell air around together a good deal. You know Burtwell? He's some kind of a promoter—or suthin'. I dunno but he's buyin' up cranberry bogs. There's his car standin' over yon'. He and Degger rides around together a good deal."

Ralph waited, his face rather blue looking, his eyes smoldering. After a time he saw Conway Degger come out of the hotel. He was with a dark, sleek-looking man.

They got into the touring car, the dark man, whom Ralph knew to be Lon Burtwell, settling himself behind the steering wheel. Ralph stepped into his own drab roadster.

The other car passed him, heading out of town on the road to Harbor Bar. Ralph pushed the starter. Then he let in his clutch. The roadster wheeled into the wake of the bigger car. Both left town at an easy pace.

Whether Degger looked back and saw that they were followed and by whom, or for some other reason, as soon as they were clear of the town the bigger car's speed was increased. It whirled away in a cloud of dust, and the roar of its muffler could have been heard for miles.

Ralph stepped on his accelerator and the low-hung roadster darted up the road as though shot out of a gun. There was no county constable by the way to time either of the cars.

The start Burtwell's car had gained in the beginning kept it well ahead for the first ten or twelve miles. The smaller car, however, was of racing model, and Ralph was a speed demon. He finally forced the nose of his machine almost under the rear axle of Burtwell's motor car and hung there with bulldog persistence.

Degger knew the pursuer was there, as was shown by his climbing upon the seat and looking over the crushed-back hood of the car. He motioned Ralph away. If the bigger car had to slow down there might be a collision.

But Endicott knew exactly what he was about. He wanted to worry the driver of the big automobile. His was the speedier machine of the two, and he

knew how to handle it to a hair. As Burtwell slowed down, Ralph shut off speed accordingly. The road was narrow here, and he waited for a wider stretch of it before proceeding with a plan he had.

"Get back!" yelled Conny Degger, gesticulating with his hand.

Grimly Endicott held to his course. Burtwell slowed still more. They came to the wider piece of road for which Ralph had been waiting.

He pulled out from behind Burtwell's car and went past like the wind. There was less than a mile on which to maneuver, and it was a lonely piece of road.

For twenty seconds the roadster dashed ahead with a thuttering roar of its exhaust. Then Ralph shut off, applied the brakes cautiously and, just as he was stopping, turned the car squarely to block the road.

Burtwell's horn emitted a scared squawk. He came to a stop with clashing gears and Burtwell himself spouting profanity.

"What do you mean, you crazy fool?" he bawled, hopping out from behind the wheel when his car had stopped with its radiator almost touching the mud-guard of Ralph's roadster.

"I have no business with you, Burtwell," Ralph replied, carelessly tossing his gloves and the cap and mask into his driving seat as he stepped from his own car. "My business is with Degger."

"What kind of a hold-up is this, anyway?" demanded Burtwell blusteringly. "Do you want to talk to this fellow, Conny?"

"I haven't got a bit of use for him," declared Degger, remaining in the seat.

Ralph's smile was grim enough.

"I've only one use for you, Degger," he said. "I'm going to mop up a part of this road with you. Get out and take your medicine."

"What's this?" snapped Burtwell. "You ruffian! Get your car out of my way and let us pass, or I'll show you something altogether new."

"Keep out of this, Burtwell," advised Ralph quietly, yet never losing sight of the promoter. "I am going to give Degger the thrashing of his young sweet life."

"What for?" demanded Burtwell.

"He knows. Perhaps it is because I don't like the color of his tie—or the cut of his coat—or that hat he wears. In any case, it is going to be just as good a thrashing as though I had the best reason in the world——

"Ah! Would you?"

Burtwell's hand had gone to his hip and he started to draw something from his pocket. Ralph stooped, leaped forward, and drove his right shoulder into the fellow's midriff as he wound his long arms tightly about his waist. Endicott had not played tackle on the scrub team for nothing!

The breath was driven out of Burtwell with an explosive grunt. Ralph wrenched the weapon from his hand, stood up, and threw the fellow full length

in the dust.

"That will be about all for *you*," he said sharply. "A pretty little automatic." He tossed the weapon over the nearest fence. "Now, Degger, get out of that car. Or are you packing some such plaything as your partner?"

He leaped to the side of the automobile and seized Degger by the shoulders. The fellow screamed as Ralph dragged him out over the door.

"Put up your fists, Degger," commanded Ralph, setting him staggeringly on his feet in the road. "Defend yourself! Whether you fight, or don't fight, I am going to do my best to change your face if I can't your morals."

"You brute!" bawled Degger, growing white.

"That won't save you," Ralph declared, and struck a blow that, landing upon Degger's forehead, knocked him clear across the road.

"Get up and take it!" exclaimed Ralph fiercely. "Or shall I come after you?"

But the blow had roused every ounce of fight there was in Conny Degger. He bounded across the road and swung his right hand high above his head. Just in time Ralph saw there was a stone in it.

He dodged, and the missile sailed over the roadside fence.

"Good!" shouted Ralph, and, leaping into the fray, struck again and again. "I don't—much care—how you fight—as long—as you—do fight!"

Each punctuation was a punch delivered. A dozen healthy blows landed about Degger's head. He was already groggy. He began to yell for Burtwell to help.

"Get something! Out of the tool box! Knock him out!" he shouted.

Ralph had not overlooked the possibility of Burtwell's coming into the fight from that angle. The man had scrambled to his feet and was doing exactly what Degger begged him to do. He was rummaging in the tool box.

At this moment Degger received a terrific blow on the jaw. He sank under it, and his eyes rolled up.

Ralph caught him before he could fall, wheeled with him in his arms and heaved him up just as Burtwell started with a heavy wrench in his hand for the common enemy.

"Didn't I tell you to keep out of this?" Ralph panted, and with a great heave of his shoulders flung the almost senseless Degger into Burtwell's face.

The two went down together, and neither immediately tried to rise.

Ralph went to his car, looked back over his shoulder, and with a flash of teeth and a bitter grin demanded:

"Got enough? You, Degger, know what this is for. If you don't put a bridle on your tongue after this, better put many a mile between us. For if I come after you again I won't let you off so easy."

He got into the car, started it, backed it around, and shot up the road on the

return journey to Clinkerport before his two victims were on their feet.

Ralph was not entirely unmarred. When he had backed his roadster into the stable behind the bungalow that served the Endicotts for a garage, he went into the washroom and bathed his bruises and the cut above his right eye.

There was room in the stable for his small car and the family automobile. The remainder of the floor space had been turned into a laboratory and workshop by Professor Endicott.

The latter caught sight of his nephew before he could plaster up the cut. He opened the door of the washroom, and, standing there, a tall, sapling-like figure in his white smock, stared rather grimly at Ralph.

"Another smash-up?" he asked.

"No, sir. The car isn't hurt. Just a little trouble with a fellow."

"With whom, may I ask?"

"That Degger." For Ralph was nothing if not perfectly frank.

A smile wreathed Professor Endicott's lips. He was an austerely handsome man with abundant hair which was gray only at the temples, and a smoothly shaven face. His eyes saw all there was to be seen through amber-tinted glasses.

That he kept much to himself, seemed not fond of society, and was wholly wrapped up in his experiments, made Professor Endicott seem less human than he really was. His sense of humor was by no means blunted.

"So you finally awoke to the presence of the worm in the apple?" he suggested.

"Degger has a dirty mouth. I had to stop it," muttered Ralph.

"It went as far as that?"

"Say! how am I going to tell Lorna who she shall, or shall not, associate with?"

"You should have a right to."

"Let me tell you, Uncle Henry, Lorna is not a girl to be bidden in any matter. No man will ever dominate her."

"You used to," said the professor, with a sudden smile.

"Yes. When we were kids. But no more. Believe me, Lorna is a young woman who knows her own mind and means to have her own way."

"Even with the man she marries?"

"She has no intention of marrying me."

"Don't you mean, Ralph, that the lack of intention is on your side?" said the professor, his brow bent sternly. "The fault lies at your door, young man. There has been a well understood arrangement for years——"

"Between the families—yes," interrupted Ralph. "But Lorna and I never agreed.'

"How can you talk so childishly?" said Professor Endicott in much the same

tone Miss Ida Nicholet used with Lorna. "It is too late to hedge now, Ralph. Be a man. Fulfil your family obligations. If the girl seems indifferent it is because you have not been sufficiently loverlike. Can't you see?"

"I see well enough; but you do not," his nephew returned bluntly. "I am quite sure Lorna cares nothing for me in that way. And I am not at all sure that I wish to marry her."

"Yet you interfere with this Degger——"

"If she was my sister I'd do that. He is a scurrilous scoundrel."

"Of course," was Professor Endicott's thoughtful comment. "I presume Lorna will attract plenty of such fortune hunters until you and she let it be publicly announced that you are engaged."

Ralph's expression changed. He wagged his head in a regretful negative.

"No, uncle, I think not. Degger, even, was bound to learn in time that the Nicholets are not as well off as they are counted."

"What? What's that?" demanded the professor, startled.

"Haven't you heard anything about it?"

"That the Nicholets have lost money?"

"*All* of their money. So I understand. I bet Lorna's father has been speculating—and with her money and Miss Ida's as well as his own."

"Great heavens, Ralph! this is not a joke, is it?" gasped his uncle.

"I don't see anything to joke about in the loss of one's fortune. Either it is so, or it is not so."

"John Nicholet is visionary. He was at me not long ago to join in one of his financial schemes. I could not be bothered. Besides, I told him plainly I needed all my ready cash for these experiments I am making.

"I—I—Ralph! If this is *true*—if our neighbors have sustained severe losses—surely you would not break off with Lorna because of that? What if she has no dowry?"

"Uncle Henry!"

"Of course not," said the professor hurriedly. "We have plenty of money, Ralph. There will be enough for you and Lorna. The little girl never need feel the pinch of poverty."

"But suppose she will not have me in any case?" cried the younger man. "I can't carry her off to the minister's and marry her, willy-nilly."

"Pooh! Pooh! Cave-man tactics are quite out of date. You are a most unromantic chap, Ralph. Why don't you try to make the girl like you? And surely she *must* marry somebody with money. It would be a calamity if she secured a penniless fellow like that Degger.

"It is your duty, Ralph, to fulfil the plans made by the two families for your welfare and the girl's. Under the disturbing circumstances you speak of, it is all

the more important that you and Lorna come to a prompt understanding. Suppose they—Miss Ida, for instance—should believe for a moment that because of their misfortune we were—er—unwilling to have the engagement announced? Why, Ralph, the Endicott name would be forever disgraced!"

"Huh!"

"If Lorna's fortune has been unwisely invested by her father—and Miss Ida's money, too—something must be done about it! Something certainly must be done!"

CHAPTER XVI

POISON

So near did Tobias Bassett's matchmaking schemes come to naught that had he known it he would have—in his own words—"let go all holts."

It seemed that his intimation to Ralph and Lorna regarding the supposed loss of their respective fortunes was a bubble that was bound to be punctured. For Professor Henry Endicott, in spite of his seemingly self-centered existence, possessed a proper share of kindliness, and considered the Nicholets' financial troubles as his own.

He seldom left his own premises. Between meals, and sometimes until late into the night, the professor lived in his laboratory, reading and experimenting. The white smock he wore while thus engaged had become much more familiar to him than evening dress.

Yet after dinner on this evening Ralph was surprised to see his uncle, arrayed in the prescribed garments for an evening call (and rather rusty they were, for Mrs. Mallow, the housekeeper, knew little about grooming a man, and their old valet, Jerome, was purblind and fairly tottering with age), march across the two lawns to the Nicholet house.

Ralph himself was seriously considering the journey which he had already hinted to Lorna he purposed taking. He was not saying anything about it at home, for he feared his Uncle Henry and his Cousin Luce would object. He was determined, however, not to waste the entire summer in loafing about Clay Head and the Twin Rocks Light.

Ralph planned for this escape from home entanglements just as another and lighter-minded young fellow might have schemed for some forbidden spree. He

packed his steamer trunk in secret.

Professor Endicott came to the dimly lit veranda of the Nicholet house, which overlooked the starlit bay. The white beam of the Twin Rocks Light was flung far seaward. Its illumination did nothing to abate the pale rays of the stars which glittered on the ruffled water of the almost land-locked harbor.

A figure in white, quietly swaying in a basket rocker, leaned forward to distinguish the man's features.

"Henry! Professor Endicott! Come up. You *are* an unexpected caller."

"Er—yes, Miss Ida. I am not very neighborly in my habits, I acknowledge. So busy—always. You know. Er—is John in his room?"

"My brother has gone to Boston," said Miss Ida, pushing a light chair toward him with her neatly slippered foot. "Will you sit down, Professor Endicott?"

"Thanks, Miss Ida. Has John gone for any length of time?"

"He could not tell me how long he would be away. But he did say he might be detained for some days. Did you wish to see him particularly?"

"Yes. I did, really. But of course I can wait for his return," Henry Endicott added hastily. "There is nothing troubling him in business, Miss Ida, is there?" he finally blurted out.

"No. Not that I know of," was the slow reply.

"I fancied the last time John spoke to me he was in some business difficulty. Nothing of—er—importance, of course. But I was so deep in the theory of an experiment at the time—ah, perhaps I did not pay sufficient attention. Of course you would know, Miss Ida?"

"My brother confides a good deal in me," said the woman placidly. "I believe he has under way some new business deal. Perhaps it is that you mean."

"Perhaps that was it," returned Endicott.

How could he come out bluntly with this suspicion Ralph had put in his mind regarding the loss of the Nicholet fortune? He could not do it!

He uttered a few commonplace remarks. He was vastly disturbed, and even a téte-à-téte with Miss Ida did not calm him. It was on the tip of his tongue all the time to venture upon the ground of financial difficulties. Yet it was quite plain to the professor's observation that Miss Ida was not after all in her brother's confidence regarding this very serious matter. If outsiders were informed of the disaster that threatened or had overtaken the Nicholets, the head of the family had managed thus far to hide it from the other members thereof.

Miss Ida was quite unaware of any present or coming disaster. The professor desired greatly to get hold of John Nicholet. He finally said:

"When John returns, tell him to come and see me." He rose from his seat. "I really wish to talk with him. Perhaps there is something I may be able to do——"

His words trailed off again into silence. He said good-night and descended

the steps. When his figure was only a dim outline across the lawn, Miss Ida sighed.

A dainty person in a shimmering frock came lightly to her side from the darker end of the porch.

"What did the professor want, Aunt Ida?"

"I really cannot imagine," Miss Ida said, quite composedly.

"But didn't he seem disturbed—more than usually difficult?"

"'Difficult' does express it, Lorna," said Miss Ida. "He said he wished to talk with your father."

"On business?" Lorna asked with some eagerness.

"Yes. He intimated as much. But why——"

"Oh, Auntie!" exclaimed the girl. "I am afraid it is true! I told father."

"What did you tell him? What are you talking about?" asked Miss Ida Nicholet in her most placid manner.

"I believe Professor Endicott is in financial difficulties. They say he has lost his money—has quite ruined the family."

"Lorna!"

"Yes. I told father. I wish he were at home now. He is so full of this new business deal that he must have forgotten what I told him I had heard about the Endicotts. I believe that is what is troubling Ralph so much—makes him go mooning about as he does."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Miss Ida. "Are you quite sure that it is not your treatment of the boy that causes his moodiness?"

"Oh, dear, Aunt Ida! Ralph Endicott does not care how I treat him. I wish you could have heard him when we were coming up from Lower Trillion the other day in his *Fenique*. Called me 'kid'! Girls mean nothing to him. At least, not *this* girl," and she laughed airily.

"But, Lorna," said her aunt, "can it be possible that this tale you have heard is true—about the loss of Henry's money?"

"Well, Aunt Ida, how did the professor impress you just now?"

"As acting very strangely—even for him. And his peculiar manner did not seem to arise as usual from his habitual absent-mindedness."

"That is what I thought. Of course the poor old fellow always does have a 'lost, strayed, or stolen' way about him——"

"Why, Lorna! Professor Henry Endicott is not old—not at all!" admonished Miss Ida heatedly.

So near did Tobias Bassett's scheme fall through. Had John Nicholet been at home the fanciful tale of financial disaster, at either the Nicholet or Endicott side of the big lawn, would have been exploded!

As it was, the next morning, before Miss Ida could make up her mind to go to Professor Endicott and put a plain question or two, the latter had plunged into

a new series of experiments from which the family did not dare to try to recall him under any circumstances. And on the professor's part, he had quite forgotten the Nicholets' financial troubles.

Ralph "fiddled about," as Tobias Bassett said, as uncertain in his direction as a crab.

"I give it as my opinion," the lightkeeper observed to Miss Heppy, "that the boy can't make up his mind whether to go about or keep on the main tack. He is as onsartain as April weather."

"I do hope he ain't sick," said his sister. "Maybe he's comin' down with something."

"Oh, sugar! There ain't nothing the matter with that fellow's health," chuckled Tobias. "All he's sickenin' for is *girlitis*—got it the worst way. Only he don't know it."

Nor was it thought of Conny Degger that disturbed Ralph's mind. At least he did not fear that individual's approach to the Clay Head or the Twin Rocks Light. He did not, however, take into consideration the possibility of Lorna's meeting the treacherous Degger at a distance.

One must occasionally shop. An entire summer could not pass without the need of renewal in the Nicholet household of clothing and domestic necessities. Clinkerport stores did not carry much variety in any merchandise. So Lorna started early one morning, driven by Jackson, the Nicholets' gardener and chauffeur, for the Big Town.

It was when she was returning and was still several miles on the far side of Clinkerport that Lorna spied a familiar figure walking ahead of the automobile in the road. She leaned over the back of the driver's seat and spoke to Jackson:

"That is Mr. Degger ahead of us, Jackson. Stop when you reach him. I wish to speak to him."

They were almost upon the pedestrian before Lorna saw the bandage about his head and that he carried his left hand in a sling. The noise of the stopping car made him look around.

Ralph had certainly fulfilled his promise. He had so greatly changed Conny Degger's facial appearance that only from the rear was he to be easily recognized.

Besides his swathed forehead he had one rainbow-colored eye and a bruise on his cheek that gave him the appearance of carrying what the children call an "all-day-sucker" in that side of his mouth. When he opened his lips to speak to Lorna the absence of two teeth made an ugly gap in an otherwise perfect upper set.

"Mercy's sake!" gasped Lorna. "What has happened to you, Mr. Degger?"

For the second time since she had known him, Lorna gained a look right into the very soul of the fellow. She had seen him display cowardice in the face of

danger. She scorned him for that, yet realized that he was a landsman and—unlike Ralph and herself—was unused to the more boisterous phases of the sea.

Here was something different. He did not sneer. It was a positively wolfish snarl that he displayed in reply to her question. The blood rushed into his face, making the whole of it almost as dark as though his bruises were a complete mask.

"So you haven't heard the glad news?" he lisped through his missing teeth.

"What do you mean, Mr. Degger?" she demanded. "Get in here. I wish to speak with you. Oh! is your arm broken?"

"My finger. When I hit him," said Degger, with a harsh laugh. "I guess he carries the mark. Haven't you seen him?-"

"Seen whom?"

"Endicott."

"I don't understand," murmured Lorna. "I have not spoken with Ralph for two days. You—were you fighting with him?"

"I tried to defend myself," snarled Degger. "He caught me unaware. I had no idea he was such a brute."

"Oh!"

"He'll come to you and brag about it, all right, when time has erased the few marks I put on him. I fought back the best I could. But he gave me no real chance—none at all."

"What did Ralph attack you for?" the girl asked, her practical sense coming to the fore. It was not easy for her to believe that Ralph Endicott had been so unfair as Degger declared.

"Oh, we had words," was the latter's hesitating reply.

"Over what?"

He looked at her from under lowered lids. The color receded from his face. The corners of his lips curled in a wolfish smile. He was not a pretty sight.

"It was nothing you would care to hear about, Miss Nicholet," was his apparently evasive reply.

She knew he desired her to urge his confidence. It would have been wiser had she refused to be thus baited. But curiosity is a most irritating complaint, and Lorna was not immune.

"I want to know what you quarreled about, Mr. Degger," she said. "I know you and Ralph had words when you left us aboard the *Fenique* down there at Lower Trillion. You were angry, or you would not have gone away from the light without bidding any of us good-bye. I think you two men are very foolish. Fighting and quarreling. Like dogs! It is most disgraceful.

"And if I thought," she added, "that you and Ralph quarreled about me——"

He flashed her another lowering glance. His smile now was most malicious.

"No, Miss Nicholet," he said quite truthfully, "your name was not mentioned

between us." Then: "Our difficulty arose over quite a different person."

"Yes?"

"I was a fool!" he exclaimed with apparent anger. "I tried to do somebody a favor. I thought I might be able to show Endicott wherein he was wrong. Never will I try again to point out his duty to a man!"

Lorna listened with growing amazement. This certainly was a new side to Degger's character!

"Just what do you mean?" she asked wonderingly.

"Well, I do not feel myself bound to secrecy. It is Endicott's affair. I only tell you what is common knowledge. There was a girl Endicott was chasing after more than a year ago."

"Indeed?" said Lorna stiffly. "I do not believe I care to hear——"

"Well, you wanted to know what the row was about, didn't you?" he snarled. "I have mentioned Cora Devine before to you. I thought it was something of a joke then. But since I have found out that Endicott treated her very shabbily. She was a silly girl, I guess—one of that kind that believe everything a fellow like Endicott tells her. And she probably knew he was rich, too."

"Oh!" gasped Lorna.

"It's a sordid piece of business," said Degger, ruminatively. "Whether he really did take her away from her folks or not, I don't know. But she needs help now, and I heard about it. I put it up to Endicott and—well, you can see what I got for my pains," he concluded with a bitter laugh.

Lorna was shaken by his words. She was disgusted and horrified. Ralph Endicott to be connected with such a sordid affair as this that Degger intimated? She could scarcely believe it. She thought she knew Ralph so well!

"I cannot imagine Ralph doing such a thing as you suggest, Mr. Degger," she said gravely. "I think I know him quite as well as anybody—better than you do, for instance——"

"I don't doubt it," interposed Degger, grimly. "But a fellow is sometimes quite different away from home—and at college—from what he is among his family and friends." He laughed harshly. "Oh, Endicott knows the girl well. See here! This he tore from his address book and threw at me when he said he'd got through with her—well, you can look or not as you please," as Lorna turned her face from him.

He had dragged from his pocket the crumpled leaf of a memorandum book and offered it to her. In spite of herself the girl could not refuse to look at it.

She recognized a leaf of the little red book she had often seen in Ralph's possession. Yes! That was his writing. She would know it anywhere. Boldly Ralph had set down:

]] "Charlestown, Mass."

Lorna was not likely to forget that name and address. A flame of anger shot all through her trembling body. She did not realize that Degger was watching her with sly delight at the mental pain he caused her.

"I would not have believed!" she murmured.

"Oh, Endicott is sly—dee-vilish sly," chuckled Degger. "But I guess Cora Devine has been causing him some worriment of late. She wants money. She's been nagging him for it, like enough. That is what made him so sore, I suppose, when I tried to say a good word for her to him.

"Oh, well! I was a fool. I assure you, Miss Nicholet, I've washed my hands of them both. If the girl finds a shyster lawyer to take up her case, Endicott will sweat. Let him. He deserves to."

"Now, I'll get down here, if you don't mind," added the fellow, as they came to the Outskirts of Clinkerport. "Thanks for the lift. I've had my lesson, I have. I'm going to mind my own affairs strictly in the future. I'm sorry for the Devine girl; but she'll have to fight her own battles as far as Endicott is concerned. Good-day, Miss Nicholet."

Lorna could not even find voice to tell Jackson to drive on. But he did so on his own initiative while Lorna sat very upright in the tonneau of the car, clutching that leaf of Ralph's address book in her hand.

CHAPTER XVII

REAL TROUBLE

Many a Paul Revere has ridden through New England hamlets since the original courier of that name and fame saw the lights twinkle in Old North's steeple. None ever carried more exciting news to the rural folk than Zeke Bassett in his motor car brought to the Twin Rocks Light early on this summer morning.

For two months the life saving crews were excused from duty at the stations. Only the captain of the crew remained on guard at the Lower Trillion station. These two summer months Zeke usually spent with Tobias and Heppy at the Light.

Occasionally Zeke made an odd dollar taking a passenger to and from the railroad station. On this morning he had driven a neighbor to the early train—"the clam train"—that stopped at Clinkerport at 5:30. When he came back he scattered along the shell road driblets of news that was destined to flash over the countryside in wide excitement.

Zeke kept his car under Ezra Condon's shed down the road, but he stopped before Miss Heppy's flower garden, where she was weeding, to tell her the news. He startled her so that the lightkeeper's sister fell back in the sand, trowel in hand, her broad face paling slowly under the peak of her sunbonnet.

"Zeke! You don't mean it's true?" demanded Miss Heppy in a smothered shriek.

"Cross my heart, Cousin Heppy!" declared the young man. "There's a crowd around the door already—and it's shut. They'll be howlin' there like wolves b'fore noon."

He started the shaking car again, and it wheezed away. Miss Heppy was several moments getting upon her feet. All strength seemed to have left her limbs.

She tottered into the lighthouse. Tobias was up in the lamp room polishing the brasswork. She might have called to him, but it did not seem to her that she could lift her voice sufficiently to make him hear. Weak as she felt bodily, she started to climb the spiral stair.

That climb was an unforgettable experience for Hephzibah Bassett. The higher she climbed the lower her spirits fell. In all her long life disaster had never looked so black and threatening before her as it did now.

For many years she and Tobias had worked, and she had scrimped and saved, against that "rainy day" that is the dread of most cautious souls of middle age. Each dollar added to their slowly growing hoard had seemed positively to lighten the burden of fear of old age on Miss Heppy's heart.

Tobias frequently called her "Martha." She admitted she was cumbered by many cares. She believed they had been very real, those troubles she saw in the offing.

And here, of late, had come the unexpected good fortune—a blessing long hoped for, yet never really believed possible by either Miss Heppy or her brother. A few hundred dollars from the estate of Cap'n Jethro Potts would have delighted them. But six thousand dollars! The gain of that sum had been quite outside their imagination.

Altogether to their joint account in the Clinkerport Bank their bankbook showed now just a few dollars over eight thousand—to these plain longshore people an actual fortune.

And now——

Miss Heppy panted her way up the last few steps. Ordinarily her flesh would have caused her to more than pant. Her face would have been as red as a sunset.

But it was positively a pallid countenance that appeared to Tobias as he briskly polished brasswork and whistled a wandering little tune through his teeth. He did not look at her at first as she appeared through the hatchway; but he

recognized her step.

"I give it as my opinion," he said reflectively, "that if I had to puff and blow like a ship's donkey-engine, comin' up them stairs, I wouldn't come aloft no oftener than I could help. What's sprung a leak now to bring you 'way up here, Heppy?"

"Tobias! Tobias!" gasped Miss Heppy.

"Oh, sugar! Take your time. Get your breath. If it's bad news I'd just as lief not hear it at all. If it's good news I've found that expectation is a sight more satisfying than fulfilment most times. I can wait——

"Dad fetch it, Heppy! what's the matter o' ye?"

She had fairly tottered into his arms. She hung to him, sobbing and gasping for breath. Tobias staggered under her weight. It was a minute or more before Miss Heppy could make audible her trouble.

"Tobias, it's gone!"

"What ye lost? Them false teeth again? I knowed——"

"Tobias, it's worse than that. It's the money!"

"What money?"

"Our money, Tobias! All our money! Uncle Jethro's legacy and all!"

"Oh, sugar, Heppy, you been dreamin'? You know that money's safe in the bank," he urged.

"But it ain't safe. The bank ain't safe. We've been robbed!" she cried, her voice rising to a thin shriek.

"Heppy! What ever do you mean? That dratted Arad Thompson! You don't mean to say he's got away with it? And in that wheel chair?"

"It isn't Arad Thompson! Oh, it isn't him!" wailed his sister. "The bank has been robbed! Burglars! Last night! Every penny of cash in it! A hundred and forty thousand dollars, so Zeke says!"

"My soul and body!" murmured the lightkeeper reverently. "A hundred and forty thousand? My! My!"

"The bank's closed——"

"Course it is this time in the morning. Them bank fellers don't work the morning tide—never."

"But there's a sign on the door. 'Tisn't going to be open. Our money's gone!"

"Say!" ejaculated Tobias, his brain beginning to function, "a hundred and forty thousand dollars oughtn't to break the Clinkerport Bank—nor yet Arad Thompson. We'll get our money——"

"'Tain't likely. Not all of it. We'll have to stand our sheer of the loss, Tobias. If *'twas* burglary! Think of it!"

"Oh, sugar!" exclaimed her brother, seating her on a stool. "You needn't never mind about that. I'm thinking of it all right. I can't think of nothin' else. Who'd you say told ye?"

"Zeke."

"Cal'late it's pretty straight then. I give it as my opinion he ain't no false alarm. Well! Well!"

He started for the stairway.

"What you goin' to do, Tobias?" sobbed Heppy.

"I cal'late to change out o' these ily clo'es and go to town. Zeke will stand by ye. I got to know the wust, as the feller in jail for murder said when they interduced the hangman to him."

Miss Heppy could not follow him at the moment. The promptness of the old seaman soon put Tobias in a presentable suit—though not the funeral garments before described. He got away before his sister was able to descend the stairs.

Zeke appeared. Tobias put a question or two and learned that the disaster was all Heppy had said. A hundred and forty thousand dollars was indeed a great fortune for Clinkerport people. Nor was it a small slice of the bank's capital.

"They tell me, Tobias," Zeke said, "that Mr. Thompson had called in a lot o' money just lately from small loans and sech, so't the bank could make an investment that he cal'lated would yield a much bigger return. Somebody must ha' knowed this for a fac', to have busted the vault door open at jest this time."

"Oh, sugar!" observed the lightkeeper. "They don't mean to say it's what them city detectives that you read about call an inside job?"

"Gosh blame it! Of course it was done inside. How'd they git to the vault door otherwise?" demanded Zeke.

Tobias grinned. He asked:

"Did they bust the door with dynamite, or did they open it fair an' proper by workin' out the combination of the vault?"

"I dunno. They busted it open an' got the money. That's all I know."

"Wal, you stay here and stand by Heppy. I'm going to town to see about it," Tobias concluded.

"Don't you want my car?"

"No. I cal'late somebody'll be along to pick me up."

In fact the lightkeeper's sharp eye had already descried a bustle about the Nicholet garage. Jackson had the car out.

When he reached the road gate of the Nicholet property, the car was just sliding down into the highway. Lorna waved him a friendly hand from the tonneau.

"Am I lucky enough to catch you going to town, Mr. Bassett?"

"I cal'late," said Tobias grimly, "the luck ain't all on one side."

"Do get in," she said as Jackson brought the automobile to a throbbing halt once he was on the highway. "I want to talk to you, anyway. What do you suppose is the matter with Ralph Endicott?"

"Huh? Oh, sugar! Why don't you ax me to explain this here fourth dimension they talk so much about? I can easy tell how wide, high, and thick Ralph Endicott is," and his eyes twinkled despite his inner trouble. "But I can't tell you the *why* of him. That's beyond all nater."

"Then you do not really know why he has gone away?"

"Oh, sugar! He *has* gone, has he? I'd disremembered. He did bid me an' Heppy good-bye night b'fore last."

"He went away with his trunk yesterday afternoon. Jerome told me nobody knew at the house where Ralph was going. They did not dare tell Professor Endicott, for he was completely submerged in some experiment and had locked the laboratory door. Ralph tucked a note under the door when he left."

"You don't say?"

"Did he not explain to you, Mr. Bassett?"

"Not a word."

"Nor to us. He came over and bade us good-bye just before he left, in a very formal way. I did not get a word with him alone. Aunt Ida asked him where he was going, and he said he could not tell just where he would finally bring up. Tobias Bassett!"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"I believe Ralph has gone away to get a job of work and is ashamed to tell us."

"If it's honest work he ain't no call to be ashamed."

"Too proud to tell us, then," flashed the girl.

"That sounds more likely."

"Anyway, he's gone!" She could not hide something besides vexation in her voice. Disturbed as Tobias was by his own trouble, he marked this fact. He believed his matchmaking scheme, as far as Lorna was concerned, was working!

"Hard work never hurt nobody." He firmly believed this fallacy. "And Ralph is rugged and capable."

"But he has not been trained to any kind of work," cried the girl with anxiety.

"Why ain't he? He can do most anything any other fellow can on a ship. And he's got a good idea of navigation into the bargain. He favors the sea, too."

"A sailor!" There was dread more than disapproval in Lorna's tone. She had never forgotten Miss Heppy's explanation of her own fear and hatred of the sea. She repeated: "A sailor!"

"No. A mate. Then a skipper. A lad like Ralph can soon work up——"

"And is that all his college training can do for him?"

"College l'arnin' won't hurt him none for a sea-farin' life," said Tobias complacently. "He can aspire to walkin' the bridge of one o' them big liners. You hafter be part dancin' master as well as navigator to sit at the head o' the captain's

table on one o' them floatin' palaces. Ralph would shine there."

"Oh, Mr. Bassett! he would not be so foolish, would he? I wish I had offered to lend him some money—enough money to straighten out the family's affairs."

"Do you cal'late what I told you I'd heard whispered about the professor foolin' away their money is so?" asked Tobias slyly.

"Oh, yes. Father is away just now. Professor Endicott came to the house to find him, and he seemed in great trouble. He as good as let the cat out of the bag."

"That he was broke?" ejaculated the startled lightkeeper.

"Yes. Something like that. To Aunt Ida."

"Oh, sugar!" murmured Tobias. Then: "Guess we're all in the same pickle."

"What do you mean?" asked Lorna, a little startled by the sudden change in the expression of the old man's countenance.

"Ain't you heard?"

"Heard what? I have heard nothing at all startling."

"Didn't your folks have any money in the Clinkerport Bank?"

"Only Aunt Ida's household account. A matter of a few hundred dollars. Why?"

"You're terrible lucky, I cal'late." Tobias sighed and shook his head. "You kin afford to lose that much."

"Why! what do you mean?" she repeated. "What has happened to the bank?"

"Been robbed. Burglars. Last night. Said to have cleaned out the cash. And the bank's shet up tight."

"Mercy!"

"Heppy's purt' near done up. She——"

"But you won't lose your money, will you? You and Miss Heppy?"

"I cal'late. And we never had a mite of fun out of it. Heppy wouldn't hear to our making no splurge with that legacy we got from Cap'n Jethro Potts. It's a judgment on us, I believe. I might have got me that silver-banded pipe I've always wanted."

She looked at him with understanding.

"You never would have smoked it, Tobias Bassett."

"Well, I could have hung it up over the mantel, couldn't I, for an ornament? Oh, sugar! My doughnut always did have the biggest hole!"

"But if the bank has been robbed——"

They came into the head of Clinkerport's main street as she spoke. Their gaze swept the thoroughfare as far as the bank building which stood directly beside the post-office.

A crowd—really a throng for Clinkerport—was gathered in front of the bank's door. The stores were deserted while the excited people milled before the

barred windows and grated door of the bank, and more were coming on foot and in vehicles from all directions.

"I cal'late folks is some stirred up," observed Tobias, as he proceeded to get out of the car.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CLUE

Coatless men and bareheaded women made up the excited company before the Clinkerport Bank, while shrill-voiced children circled the outskirts. It was like a circus or a street-fair day for the youngsters.

But among the adults there were grave faces. This disaster was a very real one to many who had scrimped and saved—like the Bassetts—for a bank account.

The Clinkerport Bank was a "one man institution." If Arad Thompson had mismanaged it, or had not taken sufficient precautions against burglary, the result might be a lasting blow to the community.

These people were not familiar enough with law and with banking affairs to understand why the Clinkerport Bank should be closed if the institution itself—and Arad Thompson—had not "gone broke" through the robbery that was reported.

"What d'ye think of it? What d'ye think, Tobias?" demanded Ezra Crouch of the lightkeeper when the latter approached the scene. "Ain't it a shame—a rascally shame? That Arad Thompson——"

"I hadn't heard tell that Arad burgled his own bank. Did he, Ez?"

"Wal, no. I dunno as he did," admitted the much-wrought-upon Mr. Crouch, who had never deposited a dollar in the bank in all his shiftless career and probably never would. "But Arad's responserble, ain't he?"

"I cal'late," agreed Tobias mildly. "Guess we better give him a chance to straighten things out——"

"I guess you ain't heard much about it, Tobias," interrupted the busy-tongued Ezra. "Something mighty funny about this robbery. Arad called in all the money he could an' seemed to get his cash-drawer crammed with it, jest so's 'twould make a good haul for these burglars. A hundred and forty thousand dollars! My!"

"Does seem a whole lot o' money to take chances with," admitted Tobias.

"Huh! And why does Arad, fust-off, telegraph to some feller they call a

'bank examiner' and get him down here on the airly train? And why does he shut the bank up as tight as a herrin' can and put a sign on the door? That's what *I* want to know."

"Time'll tell. I wouldn't get excited if I was you, Ez," advised the lightkeeper soothingly.

"Wal, that Arad Thompson——"

"I know. We got to watch him—and that wheel chair. Where is he?"

"Inside. In his office," snorted Ezra Crouch.

"Smokin' twenty-five cent *see*-gars an' takin' it easy."

"Looks suspicious," agreed Tobias, his eyes twinkling. "These times it does seem as though a feller *must* have come by his money dishonest if he smokes quarter cigars. Hullo, Mr. Compton!"

Compton kept one of the general stores. He was a bald-headed, keen-eyed man. His smile was rather grim as he acknowledged the lightkeeper's greeting.

"Good-day, Tobias. What you and Ezra doing? Going to get a rope and pick out a good tree for a necktie party? To hear some of these folks talk you'd think Arad had robbed his own self."

"How was it done?" asked Tobias.

"Plain to be seen. Back window forced from the outside. They must have worked a long time on those window-bars, to saw 'em through. But they opened the safe by learning the combination."

"Get out!"

"Fact. Didn't hurt the lock none. Either they knew the combination 'fore they started in, or they was smart enough to puzzle it out."

"They knowed the combination because they knowed it," snorted Ezra Crouch cryptically.

"But where was the watchman?" Tobias asked.

"Doped," said Compton. "You know Bill Purvis? Good man, but never any too smart. Always keeps his lunch basket and bottle of cold tea on a beam under the shed back of the post-office. Everybody in town knew 'twas there and that Bill took a snack about 'leven o'clock, or a little later.

"They drugged his tea last night, and he woke up under the shed just before four o'clock this morning. He see the bank window open and the bars bent up and he ran to Arad's house. Arad telephoned a message to the telegraph operator at the station, who put it through for this bank examiner, before he even tucked his shirt in, so they say."

"Yep," ejaculated the suspicious Mr. Crouch. "Looks mighty like Arad knowed the bank had been robbed, spang off!"

"He could easy guess it," said Compton, with a dry chuckle, "considering the look of that back window."

"I see," said Tobias. "Nobody ever could accuse Arad Thompson of being slow."

"Oh, he's smart enough," sneered Ezra. "That's what we all air worried about."

The lightkeeper asked the storekeeper:

"Mr. Compton, haven't they found any of them there clues ye read about? Burglars always leave clues, don't they?"

"There's the open window and the sawed bars," returned Compton.

"Huh!" sneered the sparrowlike Ezra, "they couldn't very well take 'em away with them, could they?"

Tobias gave him no further heed. He was "studying."

"Mr. Compton," he said again, "I've noticed them winder bars. They are master thick."

"You are right, Tobias."

"Nobody could saw through one of them—not with a meat saw—in a short time. And I have read that them sort of saws is made out o' watch springs. Mighty flimsy they must be. 'Twouldn't be like cutting cheese with a dull knife."

"I believe you, Tobias."

"If Bill Purvis," went on the lightkeeper reflectively, "went for his lunch about 'leven, then them burglars couldn't have been sawin' on the bars much before midnight. Humph! Let's go 'round there and take a squint."

Tobias and the storekeeper, with Ezra Crouch tagging them, entered the lane between the bank building, which was built of cement blocks, and the post-office, which was a frame structure. The window in question overlooked a stableyard at the back.

"I give it as my opinion," said the lightkeeper, "that them burglars couldn't have worked here till after Bill was dead to the world in that shed yonder. Else he'd have seen 'em."

"You're right, Tobias."

"And look at them bars," continued the lightkeeper. "Ha'f as thick as my wrist. How'd you like to stand here—on a flimsy box, 'tis likely—and saw away at them two bars? For how long? I cal'late 'twas something of a job. 'Twould take more'n *one* hour—nor yet *two*!"

"Uh-huh!" agreed the storekeeper.

"And then they crawled in and worked on the door of the vault, and got it open. Well, well! That must have taken some time, too. And they got clean away with the money before four o'clock?"

"They worked quick," said Compton.

"But they couldn't work quick sawin' them bars. That would take just so much time, however smart they was."

"Well?"

"Why," said Tobias, "I don't see how they could have done it all in one night."

Ezra Crouch laughed raucously. "O' course they done it last night," he said. "If they'd cut the bars before, somebody would have seen it."

"Not so sure," Tobias rejoined. "I give it as my opinion that they must have worked here before—mebbe on several nights. Almost sawed through the bars and smutched dirt over the cracks to hide 'em. About all they had to do last night was to force the bars apart after Bill was asleep. And then they got in and worked on the safe."

"But why didn't Bill Purvis see 'em the other nights?" Compton wanted to know.

"Like enough because he was sleeping like he was last night," Tobias rejoined promptly. "Nobody had to drug his tea. You always see Bill Purvis wanderin' around before folks go to bed. But who ever kept tabs on him after 'leven or twelve o'clock? I cal'late Bill rolled out of the hay this morning 'bout his usual time and found the bank robbed."

"I swanny!" murmured Ezra.

"It might be like you say, Tobias," agreed Mr. Compton.

"Yes. It might. Huh! What's this?"

The lightkeeper stooped and picked something out of the sand just under the forced window. It was a small, flat, gold penknife. There were a few gold links attached to one end. It had been torn from a watch chain.

"I give it as my opinion," murmured Tobias, "that it was scraped off as the feller worked his way in over that winder-sill. I reckon, Mr. Compton, here is a real clue."

"Huh!" muttered the doubting Ezra. "I don't believe Arad Thompson ever wore that dinky little thing."

"Oh, sugar!" exclaimed the amused lightkeeper. "I don't guess Arad was anywhere hereabout when the burglars crawled in at that window. And he never wore this here doo-dad on his watch chain, nohow."

He shook his head, staring at the penknife reflectively. He had seen that knife—or one much like it—before. In whose possession?

"Cal'late I better see Arad about this," he said finally. "When the perlice come to take holt on this case, Arad will want to give them all the help he can."

"Then," said Compton, the storekeeper, with growing admiration, "you don't believe this robbery was done by nary couple of burglars that come to town last night and got clean away before morning?"

"I don't know about their getting away," said Tobias. "Maybe it would be well to look about to see who's missing. But these burglars must have been in town some time and knowed all about the bank and Bill Purvis. No doubt o' that,

Mr. Compton."

"Wal," croaked Ezra Crouch, his eyes like big porcelain buttons, "who's gone away since last night? *I* dunno, 'less 'tis old Miz Janey Ring that's gone down to Harbor Bar to visit with her darter-in-law."

"Oh, sugar!" snorted Tobias.

"And it ain't sure they got away by train," said the storekeeper. "Who has gone out by boat, or left in an automobile?"

"That's what I say," Tobias observed, still staring at the gold knife. "Maybe them burglars ain't left town at all. No tellin'. Humph! I cal'late I'd better give this to Arad."

He walked to the side door of the bank—the door opening on the lane—and punched the button.

CHAPTER XIX

SUSPICIONS

Lorna Nicholet was some time doing Miss Ida's marketing on this morning. When she finally came out of the butcher's shop and started for her car she observed Conny Degger sitting on the Inn porch. The young man threw away his cigarette and started up, evidently intending to greet her.

To tell the truth, Lorna was sorry to see Degger. Just at this time she did not crave any conversation with him. Had Jackson not stepped out of the car and crossed over the way to join the crowd before the bank, she would have given Degger a very curt "good-morning" and told the chauffeur to drive home.

She did not know, however, that she had any personal reason for snubbing Degger. She sighed, and as he raised his cap nonchalantly, she offered him a polite smile.

"At last something has struck Clinkerport to wake it up, Miss Lorna."

His bruised face was much more presentable, but the two missing teeth made his smile sinister. Lorna had found no opportunity to question Ralph about that fight before he had gone away. She knew but one side of the story, yet, somehow, she failed to make herself believe that Degger's tale had been exact.

The insinuations—more, the direct accusation—Degger made regarding Ralph and the Devine girl seemed less reasonable the more Lorna thought about it. She had known Ralph ever since she had known anybody. He was chivalrous

by nature, generous to a fault, kindly of motive, and always the gentleman. Might not these very attributes of character have led him into some entanglement with a designing girl that the latter was now trying to take advantage of? What Lorna so well knew of Ralph's character did not fit the college reputation Degger gave him.

Lorna's ready tongue replied with little hesitation to Degger's remark:

"What a dreadful thing! If the depositors have to lose any of their money——"

"Oh, if the bank officers were up to date they carried burglary insurance enough to cover the loss."

"But a hundred and forty thousand dollars!"

Degger's eyes twinkled. "Some haul—I'll say it is!" he agreed. "Those yeggs must have been vastly astonished when they found all that in the safe. No wonder they did not stop to tinker with the post-office."

"Oh! Have they discovered already who did it?"

"Why," laughed Degger, "of course the bank people and the local police are running around in circles. But it is easy to understand that a crack like this was made by a bunch of yeggs who probably came into town last night on a hand-car. Usually such gangs tap both the bank and the post-office in such a burg as this. But the bank yielded such a harvest they left the P.O. alone."

"Did nobody see or hear them?"

"I did not, anyway; although I was up half the night with a toothache. I expect I'll have to run up to Boston to see my dentist. He's put a crown on a tooth that is kicking up rusty.

"I was up, as I say, more than once during the night doctoring that tooth. But the Inn is on this side of the street, and our rooms—Lon Burtwell's and mine—are at the back of the hotel. If those yeggs had used dynamite to blow open the vault door I imagine I wouldn't have heard it."

"My!" said Lorna, much interested after all, "I hope the poor people won't have to lose their money. Just think! All the money Tobias and Heppy Bassett had in the world was in that bank."

"Yes?" said Degger carelessly. "But the fact that the bank examiner is here and has taken charge doesn't mean anything particular. The depositors needn't be so frightened, I guess. But of course the bank officers can't be held wholly accountable for a burglary."

"But you said——"

"They should have carried burglary insurance sufficient to cover the cash in hand—yes. And the Clinkerport Bank probably does belong to the American Bankers' Association, so that the best detectives in the country will be sent out after the yeggs.

"Still, and nevertheless, every bank burglary is not satisfactorily explained nor the burglars captured. And for a small institution like this, it is a big loss."

"I am thankful we didn't have much on account here," said Lorna reflectively. "I don't know about our neighbors on Clay Head. Perhaps the Endicotts——"

"That hard-boiled egg, Ralph Endicott, will be half crazy if he's been nipped by this," sneered Degger. "If he had money in the bank I wonder he isn't over here now, roaring about it."

Lorna's manner changed.

"Ralph is not at home," she said rather tartly. "He has gone away."

"Indeed! When did that happen?"

"He went yesterday."

"Not so early, I guess," Degger rejoined confidently. "I saw him here last evening."

"In town?"

"Yes. Fact is, I saw him twice. Once about nine and again an hour or so later. I was sitting on the Inn porch and saw him pass the bank and post-office on the other side of the street. He went slouching by under the trees there."

"Why, Mr. Degger, I thought he left town in the afternoon."

"If he did he came back again. Of course, I did not speak to him. But I am not likely to make a mistake in identifying him, wherever I see him. And he couldn't have got out of town after I saw him, come to think of it, until this morning. Not by train; for there are no trains in either direction after the time I saw him. That's sure."

"That is strange," murmured Lorna. "I am sure the family thought he had gone——"

She noted the oddly curious gaze Degger had fixed upon her face, and she halted. She felt uncomfortable. She wondered what it meant—this odd performance of Ralph's. She wished Jackson would return to the car. But somebody did break away from the excited crowd before the bank and cross the wide thoroughfare toward the automobile.

Ezra Crouch's bald face shone with curiosity and his glance shifted from Degger to the girl in the car. The tale that Degger himself had told about town, implicating Lorna Nicholet and Ralph Endicott, had been a choice morsel under Ezra's tongue. He thought the present situation pregnant of further gossip.

"He, he! Ain't this a queer set-to?" he wanted to know. "Those folks that have lost money think they can *talk* it back into their pockets. I can tell 'em——"

"Haven't they any idea who the burglars were, Mr. Crouch?" interposed Lorna.

"Not the fust idee. 'Nless it's Tobias. Tobias is sharp. He's found the only clue, as they call it, that's been found so far. But that Arad Thompson——"

"What has the skipper found, Ezra?" asked Degger, lighting another cigarette.

"A gold knife. Found it right under that winder where the burglars sawed through the bars."

"A gold knife!" repeated Lorna with interest. "They surely did not use such a tool to cut the window bars?"

"Bless ye, no, Miss Lorny! But 'tis evident—an' so Tobias says—that one o' the burgulars tore it off his watch chain when he scrambled in over the winder-sill."

"Oh! It was a gold penknife? And he wore it on a watch chain like——"

Again she halted in the middle of a sentence. She paled and then flushed, flashing a sly glance at Degger. He seemed not to have noticed what she said. He was not even looking at her.

"Oh!" she whispered again, and was glad that Jackson saw her waiting and that he hurried back to the car.

"Good-day, Mr. Degger. Good-day, Mr. Crouch," she said, as Jackson got in and started the engine.

Lorna did not show Degger her face again. She continued to think about that gold penknife that had been found under the bank window. Ralph Endicott wore such a knife on his watch chain. And Degger said he had seen Ralph in town last evening—long after he was supposed to have left Clinkerport by train.

Of course, any thought linking Ralph with the mysterious penknife was ridiculous. It could not be that the most evil-intentioned tongue would dovetail Ralph's movements with the Clinkerport Bank robbery. Yet—Lorna did not trust Conway Degger!

What would Degger say, in his sneering way, if he learned the Endicotts were impoverished and that Ralph probably had very little money left?

Ralph had been seen by Degger in the village late the previous evening—too late to have left town by train thereafter. Suppose that awful Devine girl was pressing Ralph for money and threatening to disgrace him if he did not produce it?

Was that why Ralph had left home so suddenly and mysteriously? Did he fear disgrace? Was it because he could not satisfy Cora Devine, and so close her lips?

If Degger's story of Ralph's misstep should be true! Supposing Degger knew Ralph was being hounded for money he could not pay, what would he say if Ralph was in the most remote way linked by suspicion to the bank robbery?

Tobias Bassett meanwhile had gained entrance to the bank after some parley with

Rafe Silver, Mr. Thompson's Portuguese servant. Arad Thompson had been skipper of a smart bark in his youth and had brought Silver back from Fayal with him on one of his voyages. Silver was a grim little man, black as aged mahogany, thin-lipped and gray of hair, wearing tiny gold rings in his ears.

"This ain't nothing to do with my money, Rafe," Tobias said. "You tell Arad Thompson I have something to tell him about them burglars."

So, after a time, the lightkeeper was admitted. Two pale-faced and scared looking clerks were at the beck and call of the bank auditor. The other employees of the institution, like the general public, were shut out of the building.

In the railed-off enclosure he used as an office, and where he met the bank's customers, Arad Thompson sat in the wheel chair, in which he spent most of his waking hours, before his table-topped desk.

He was a big-bodied man, his torso quite filling the wide-armed chair. His withered limbs were hidden by a soft robe, the upper edge of which was never allowed to fall below his waistline.

He was a handsome man of a patriarchal cast of countenance, his genial expression enhanced by waving silvery hair and a heavy beard of the same color—that silvery hue which revealed the fact that originally the hair of head and face had been jet black.

With his ruddy cheeks and sharp gray eyes, the bank president gave abundant evidence of possessing, aside from his crippled limbs, a healthy body and a thoroughly alert brain. Arad Thompson had been studying a little red-covered memorandum book. He laid it aside as Tobias came near.

"Well, Tobias," he asked directly, "what is it? I can answer no question about the bank or its loss until the bank examiner makes his report."

"Not to say I ain't anxious for me an' Heppy's money—for I be. But I will say, Mr. Thompson, that 'tain't about that I want to see you."

"So Rafe tells me."

"I was wandering around back of the bank there just now with Silas Compton. We looked at the winder where them bars was sawed. I give it as my opinion, Mr. Thompson, that them burglars didn't saw them bars in two in one night—nossir!"

"I had thought of that, Tobias," said the bank president patiently.

"Don't look like it was just a gang of burglars that come in here last night for the first time and happened to hit it lucky."

"No. I am convinced they had advice, if not assistance, in turning the trick."

"Maybe you got your suspicions of who helped 'em?" said Tobias shrewdly.

"If I have I'm not going to tell you, Tobias."

"I don't want you should—nossir!" said the lightkeeper. "I'd just as lief not know. But I am going to show you what I picked up under that winder just now.

Compton and Ez Crouch seen me."

The bank president sat up straighter. He flashed a glance at the little red book. Then he looked again at Tobias.

"What is it?"

The lightkeeper brought his hand out of his pocket and displayed the gold penknife.

"You picked that up under the window?"

"Yes."

"Any mark on it? Anything whereby the owner can be identified? Do you know, Tobias, who it belongs to?"

"Oh, sugar!" declared Tobias. "It might not have been lost by one of the burglars. Then again——"

Thompson took the knife, opened the blade, and turned the little toy over and over on his palm.

"Of course," he murmured, "there might be a dozen men wearing things like this on their watch chains——"

"Not here in Clinkerport," interposed Tobias.

"No. That's so. But there is no identifying mark."

"Look at the chain. Dreffful fine links, but awful strong."

"It is platinum. An expensive chain. Not likely, after all, to be worn by many."

"That kind of narrows suspicion down, doesn't it?" said Tobias with some eagerness.

"It must. A platinum watch chain costs a deal of money, Tobias. There must be an excellent watch at the other end of the chain. No ordinary person would be likely to wear such an ornament. These burglars——"

"Maybe they stole it," suggested Tobias.

Thompson looked at the red book again. He wagged his bushy head, and sat, tight-lipped and thoughtful.

"That is possible," he finally agreed. "But if the knife and the few links of chain can be traced——"

"'Tis a clue," Tobias said. "Looks like somebody might be in this job who wasn't just an ordinary burglar. Heh?"

"I'll allow that, Tobias."

"Well, that is all I had to tell you, Mr. Thompson. I reckon you'll give the knife to the city detectives when they come?"

"Naturally. I will put all possible clues into their hands," the bank president rejoined, glancing again at the little red book.

"Course, there may be nothing to it. But who else could have lost that knife there without making talk about it—advertised the loss, as ye might say?"

"True," agreed Thompson.

"Probably it belongs to somebody who is kind of a fancy dresser. No ordinary longshore clam digger would own such a thing. I give it as my opinion that it might have been lost by some feller—whoever he was—that has been hangin' around the port long enough this summer to l'arn all them burglars wanted to know about the bank, and the watchman, and all. Heh?"

"Sounds reasonable, Tobias."

"I cal'late. And he must be one of the summer folks."

"That is so, too. Whom do you suspect, Tobias?"

The lightkeeper grinned. He wagged his head.

"Oh, sugar!" he said, paying Arad Thompson back in his own coin. "If I am suspecting anybody, I ain't going to tell you, Mr. Thompson. Nossir!"

CHAPTER XX

PUT TO THE QUESTION

Tobias had more than satisfied his curiosity in coming to town. His discovery of the gold penknife was the sum of the assistance he could give Arad Thompson, the bank's president, at this time. His interest in the burglary, however, continued to be keen; but he went back to the Twin Rocks Light soon after noon.

He could take little cheer to Heppy. For just how much the depositors of the bank must suffer because of the loss of the hundred and forty thousand dollars, Tobias had no idea. Nobody with whom he talked seemed to know. All were pessimistic.

"Looks like something was the trouble besides just the burglary," croaked one bird of ill-omen, perched like a buzzard on the horse rack before Silas Compton's store. "Else Arad would have sent for some cash from somewhere and gone on with business, same as usual. This shutting the bank tight's a drum——"

"They say it's the new bankin' law done it," interposed somebody.

"Dunno. Don't look right. If the bank's rotten we'd ought to have a chance to get what money we can out of it."

"That's right! 'Fore we lose it all."

"Guess it's all gone by now," groaned another.

"Say!" observed Tobias, after listening to this talk for some time, "I give it as my opinion Arad Thompson is a purty slick citizen. He was smart to get that

bank examiner here—no two ways about it! Otherwise there would have been a run on the bank. We'd all have been crazy to try to get our money."

"Why shouldn't we get it? It's our'n."

"Wal," Tobias said slowly. "I don't s'pose Arad can call all his loans in on the dot. Nossir! Why should we expect him to pay us just whenever we want it—all in a lump?"

The lightkeeper could study out the reason for the bank president's attitude and logically come to the conclusion he did. Arad Thompson knew Clinkerport folk well. Suspicion would be rife in any case and the moment announcement was made of the robbery many would rail against his management of the bank's funds. The president was taking no chances.

Without a penny of cash left in the bank, the depositors would have been clamoring at the cage windows like wolves had the doors not remained barred.

There were those people, too, who had "inside information." There are always these "know-it-alls" in every community.

"No use trying to smooth it over, Tobias," whispered one of these to the lightkeeper. "There's something fishy about Arad's bank. I ain't got a cent in it—never would put any in. I always have had my suspicions of Arad Thompson.

"But Phil Henry is my next-door neighbor, an' Phil Henry is cashier. He ain't been let into the bank this morning no more than the other officers. And Phil told me that right lately Arad's been getting his hands on all the cash he could. Mebbe he did have as much as a hundred and forty thousand there."

"Wal?" proposed Tobias, unshaken.

"Drat it all, Tobe? Don't you see? Or won't ye? Mebbe there ain't been no real burglary at all. Looks funny. They say the vault door was opened on the combination. That 'twasn't busted."

"Huh?"

"Arad just *says* there was a burglary. S'pose he'd arranged for somebody to saw them bars on the sly and bust the winder-lock and drug Bill Purvis's tea? Heh? S'pose Arad robbed the bank hisself?"

"Oh, sugar!" murmured Tobias. "That's what they all say. Why don't you suggest something new?"

"All right! All right! Don't you believe it, Tobe," said his acquaintance. "You will remember what I told ye when you don't see hide nor hair of your money again."

"I don't see it now," confessed Tobias rather ruefully. "But I still have hopes of Arad's being pretty average honest."

He found Heppy one of the most pessimistic of all those affected by or interested in the bank burglary. She was actually ill. Whether it was the excitement or the over-exertion of climbing the lighthouse stairs to the lamp room, the woman

gave every indication of bodily as well as of mental illness.

She sat in her rocking chair before the kitchen stove, weaving back and forth, and sobbing. When she raised her head to look at her brother as he entered, he was actually startled by her appearance.

"Oh, sugar, Heppy! What's the matter o' ye?"

[image]

"Oh, sugar, Heppy! What's the matter o' ye?"

"Did—did you get our money, Tobias?" she gasped.

"No, no! O' course not. Things have got to be straightened out."

"Did you see Arad Thompson?"

"Yes. I talked personally with him, Heppy."

"What did he say?" urged the woman.

"Why, he couldn't say nothin' yet. Not till the bank's books was gone over. It's bein' done."

"Tobias, that's only an excuse. We'll never see a penny of our money again!" And his sister broke into passionate sobs.

"Dad fetch it!" ejaculated Tobias, "I give it as my opinion that there ain't never been such a unanimity of opinion on one subject in this community since Noah stepped ashore from the ark. You folks have got it all settled that Arad Thompson is so crooked that he can't lay straight in bed. Oh, sugar!"

It was a very gloomy afternoon and evening at the Twin Rocks Light. The men got what little supper there was. Heppy went to bed still weeping and with a hot brick at her feet.

"An' I give it as my opinion, 'Zekiel," said the lightkeeper to the younger man, with frank disgust in his tone, "that Heppy can think with that hot brick just as good as she can with her head. There ain't no mortal sense in her fussin' and fumin' the way she does."

"But, Tobias! if the money is gone?"

"Oh, sugar!" snorted Tobias. "Mourning over it won't bring our money back. If we've got to lose it, we've got to—that's all."

"But—eight—thousand—dollars!"

"I know. You say it like 'twas eight hundred thousand. But neither sum seems to mean so much to me—not re'lly. I sure won't lose no sleep over it—nor ary meal o' victuals, if I can help it.

"'What can't be cured must be endured,'" repeated this longshore philosopher. "I never re'lly felt that I had much part nor lot in our savings. Once I was in

New Bedford when some whalers was paid off after a four-year cruise. A drunken boat steerer stood on the corner of the street an' fed silver dollars into the mouth of a sewer till the police stopped him.

"Puttin' money in the bank always seemed to me something like that, 'Zekiel. You see it go in, but where it goes to, an' what happens to it, is like what the Scriptures says about the ways of the Almighty—they are 'past finding out.'"

"Huh!" said Zeke. "Looks like we know what's happened to this money. 'Twas stole by somebody."

"Oh, sugar!" murmured Tobias. "Is that any satisfaction?"

Tobias Bassett had refused to admit to Arad Thompson that he had any suspicion as to the identity of the owner of the gold penknife he had found under the bank window. Nor did he have such suspicion.

It was merely that the old lightkeeper felt that sometime, somewhere, he had seen such a toy worn on a watch chain by somebody he knew. Unlike Lorna Nicholet he did not remember that Ralph Endicott owned such an ornament.

The young woman rode home from her marketing expedition in a very anxious condition of mind. One moment she mentally castigated herself for considering at all the suggestion that the penknife might be Ralph's property. The next instant the suspicion would attack her from another angle and his possible connection with the bank burglary would expand until she was fairly terror-stricken.

If Ralph had been seen in the town the previous evening by other eyes than those of Conway Degger! If Ralph had seemed to leave Clinkerport in the afternoon, how explain his later presence there?

If Degger thought he could cast any reflection upon Ralph by reporting his observation of the latter in town the night of the burglary, of course he would do so. There was no doubt of that in Lorna's mind. She had no longer any illusions regarding the character of Degger, no matter how much she might disapprove of Ralph. Degger was Ralph's enemy, and a bitter enemy indeed.

Innocent men have fallen under the burden of false accusation, often and again. Several things seemed to yield circumstantial evidence connecting the bank robbery with Ralph Endicott, ridiculous as such evidence must be to the minds of those who really knew him.

If the penknife was his—or like the one he wore! If he really had returned to Clinkerport secretly last evening! If it was a fact that Cora Devine was hounding Ralph for money! And if, as Lorna supposed, the Endicotts were in financial straits and Ralph was without funds!

These suppositions and possibilities wrought upon the young woman's mind until, when she arrived home, she found it almost impossible to hide from the family her perturbation. Her father had not yet returned from Boston. Had he been at home she would have put her fears and suspicions before him.

For, after all, John Nicholet bred a greater confidence in his daughter's mind and heart than did the self-repressed Miss Ida. With the latter Lorna could not bring herself to discuss the mystery of Ralph Endicott's affairs.

She gave to her aunt the bald statement of the bank's loss, and that was all. But Lorna felt that she must search and find all she could that might explain the mystery which, like a haze, surrounded Ralph's absence from home.

She went to Jerome, the Endicott's doddering old servant whom the professor's "Cousin Luce," who was supposed to preside over the household, was forever threatening to pension off.

Miss Ida had scornfully stated that "Lucy Markham ran the Endicott house by fits and starts—the fits being frequent and the starts but seldom!" a statement which was scarcely a libel. If Cousin Luce did not feel like leaving her bed, or had a more than usually interesting novel to read, she remained unseen by the family, sometimes for a couple of days. But the family somehow muddled along without her.

Ralph was too old to lose much by the lack of system in the home. And of course Professor Endicott did not even notice when household matters went wrong. The children helped each other, and somehow were happy.

As it chanced, Mrs. Markham was not visible when Lorna made her appearance at the Endicott house. Whether it was a new novel or a twinge of rheumatism that kept Cousin Luce in her room Lorna did not inquire. An interview with Professor Endicott, had she wished it, was quite out of the question, for he was deep in his experiments.

"Jerome," said Lorna to the old servant, "do you know if Ralph lost that little gold penknife that he wears on the end of his watch chain?"

"No, Miss. I do not know. Was it lately he lost it?"

"That is what I wish to know. *Did* he lose it?"

"I couldn't say, Miss. He said nothing about losing it to me."

"Then it is pretty sure he did not lose it before he went away yesterday—if he lost it at all," murmured the young woman thoughtfully. "You would probably have missed it yourself, Jerome."

"I don't know about that, Miss. I don't have much to do with Master Ralph's things. No, Miss. Maybe Mrs. Malloy——"

But the housekeeper knew no more than Jerome. Lorna dared go no further with her inquiries. She feared that she might rouse suspicion in the minds of the servants.

She heard nothing more about the bank burglary that day, or what was being done regarding it. She spent a most miserable night. By morning she could not longer remain idle in the matter. She felt that she must confer with somebody and she started for the Twin Rocks Light. Lorna wanted to learn if Tobias Bassett

likewise suspected that the gold penknife he had found belonged to Ralph.

Although the time was mid-forenoon, Tobias was smoking his pipe on the bench outside the lighthouse door. And he wore one of Miss Heppy's voluminous kitchen aprons.

"Why, Mr. Bassett! what is the matter?"

"Oh, sugar! That you, Lorny? I've been promoted to be chief pot-walloper of this here craft. 'Zekiel is aloft, cleaning the lamp."

"But Miss Heppy?"

"She's abed. I cal'late she's down for a spell o' suthin', I dunno what 'tis, and I reckon she don't. But whatever 'tis it's struck in."

"Tobias! She is not really ill!"

"She's sick enough," he rejoined, shaking an anxious head. "Bein' sick is mostly in your mind, it always did seem to me. If your mind ain't ready for doctorin' you manage to keep on deck and muddle through somehow. But once your mind gets sick, you lose all holts. And Heppy's lost all holts this time, I do allow. She thinks she won't never see none o' that money we had in the Clinkerport Bank again—never! And it's just about scuttled the ship for her—yessir!"

"But, Tobias! of course the bank isn't bankrupt. There will be no great loss for each individual depositor."

"We dunno that. Dunno much of anything about it. I give it as my opinion that it looks queer. And, as I said afore, Heppy's gin up all hope."

"Oh, that is too bad!" Lorna said. "I must see her. Is she alone?"

"Ain't no women folks around, if that's what you mean. 'Zekiel and me air the whole crew and afterguard. The captain's forsook the ship."

Lorna hesitated before going into the lighthouse, staring down at the rather despondent looking Tobias. She spurred her courage to ask:

"I am told that you found a penknife under the bank window that may have been dropped by one of the burglars."

"So I did," replied Tobias placidly.

"Do you really think it was lost by one of the robbers?"

"Likely. Don't see how else it would have got there."

"Have you no idea who the owner is?"

The lightkeeper wrinkled up his eyes shrewdly and stared at her. He removed the pipe from his mouth.

"I don't count a wide acquaintance among burglars and such, Miss Lorny."

"But—but it might not belong to a burglar!"

"Sure enough. Who do you cal'late it might belong to?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I—I—why do you ask that?" Then, her eyes searching the highway in the direction of Clinkerport, she cried: "Who is this coming, Tobias?"

He turned from her to stare at the blue motor car approaching. He still held his pipe at a reflective poise, for Lorna's evident disturbance of mind had impressed him.

"Oh, sugar!" he murmured. "This here is Arad Thompson's car. You don't s'pose he's come to bring me and Heppy our money, do you? It 'ud please Heppy purt' nigh to death."

CHAPTER XXI

THE RISING TIDE OF DOUBT

Lorna Nicholet made no further comment, waiting anxiously for the big blue limousine to approach. Surely it would stop before the lighthouse.

It did. The door of the car opened. But the crippled Arad Thompson did not appear. Instead, a broad-hatted stranger in a rusty black suit stepped out of the car.

"That's Rafe Silver driving, as usual," murmured Tobias. "But who is this fellow? He ain't no acquaintance of mine."

The stranger came promptly to the lighthouse door. He glanced sharply from the lightkeeper sitting on the bench with his pipe to the young woman in the doorway, and back again.

"You are Mr. Tobias Bassett?" was his opening speech.

"I cal'late."

"Mr. Arad Thompson has sent me to you for some information."

"I'm chock-full of it," rejoined Tobias easily, putting his pipe between his lips again and waving his hand.

"Confidential information," continued the man, glancing again at Lorna.

"That's all right," said Tobias. "This young woman knows almost as much as I do, and a little extry information won't hurt her a mite. What was you lookin' to find out?"

"My inquiry is in regard to the robbery of the Clinkerport Bank night before last."

He threw back the left lapel of his coat with a practiced gesture, revealing a glittering badge pinned near the armhole of his vest.

"Oh, sugar!" murmured Tobias. "A real detective? I cal'late I'm pinched."

Lorna dropped a fluttering hand upon his shoulder, but then saw that the

old lightkeeper was still smiling cheerfully.

"You fire ahead, Mister."

"Did you ever see this knife before you picked it up under the bank window?" and the detective displayed the toy in his palm.

"Oh, sugar! Can't say as I did. And yet I might. Seems to me—wal, I cal'late I better say no and be done with it. I can't somehow seem to place that thing," declared the lightkeeper, in deep reflection.

He did not notice Lorna's expression of countenance.

"I hope you will not withhold your opinion, Mr. Bassett," said the detective.

"You take it from me, Mister," Tobias rejoined grimly, "I ain't going to refuse any information that may lead to the recovery of the bank's money and the arrest of the burglars. Me and Heppy's got an eight thousand dollar interest in the robbery, as ye might say."

"You are prepared to help us, then, no matter who is hit, are you?"

"I cal'late," agreed Tobias wonderingly.

The detective produced a little red-covered notebook from his pocket. He thrust it toward the lightkeeper.

"Did you ever see this before?"

"I don't know. Can't be sure that I ever did. But, mebbe."

"This address book was found on a ledge right by the vault door. There seems to be no doubt as to whom it belongs, for the owner's name in his own handwriting is on the fly-leaf. Mr. Thompson is quite convinced of the ownership of the book, for there are specimens of the same handwriting on file in the bookkeeping department of the bank."

"My goodness!" gasped Tobias, staring at the book but refusing to take it from the other's hand.

"This book could not have been on the ledge where it was found at the time the bank closed day before yesterday. The vault door was opened on the combination. And the combination is written on one of the pages of this address book."

"Oh, sugar!" murmured Tobias. "Then you've just as good as got one of the burglars, ain't you?"

"Oh, no!" gasped Lorna, cowering in the doorway.

The men did not appear to notice her agitation. Tobias still smoked calmly. The detective hesitated for a moment before he fairly forced the red memorandum book into the lightkeeper's hand.

"Look at it," he said. "See that name on the front page? Do you know his handwriting?"

Lorna dared not look over the lightkeeper's shoulder. At first glance she had recognized the red-covered notebook. There might have been some doubt regarding the ownership of the penknife; but of the notebook—never!

"My soul and body!"

The pipe dropped from the lightkeeper's fingers and was shattered at his feet. He gave this no attention. He was staring, quite fascinated, at the flyleaf of the little book.

"Doesn't the knife belong to the same person?" asked the detective, with sharp insistence.

For once Tobias was ready with no reply. He fluttered the leaves of the book with unsteady fingers. The visitor continued:

"Mr. Thompson said you would know if anybody did. He says you are a great chum of this fellow's—that he hangs about the lighthouse here a good deal.

"Now, there is no possibility of the book's having been left there before the vault door during banking hours. That fellow was never inside the cage for any purpose whatsoever."

Tobias finally regained his voice.

"You don't mean to say you think he'd be foolish enough to leave this book right in sight if he was one o' them burglars?"

"But I tell you it was found there. And you yourself found the knife under the window. Isn't that his, too?"

"I wouldn't go so far as to say it was, nor I wouldn't say it wasn't," announced the old lightkeeper with emphasis. "But it looks right senseless for him to have left the book there—let's see where you say he marked down the combination? That looks right silly, too. If he knowed the combination well enough to open the safe, why bother to write it down?"

"There it is," said the detective, pointing, and with emphasis. "Those figures in pencil. That is the bank vault combination. Or it was. Of course, it will be changed now."

"Yes. I see. Lockin' the garage door after the tin Lizzie's been stole," commented Tobias.

He squinted a long time at the row of numbers and letters written across the otherwise blank page. He turned back a leaf or two, and appeared to study the addresses written thereon.

"Yes," he muttered. "Writ down in pencil. All the rest in ink. He most always *does* carry a fountain pen."

"No doubt about that knife being his, too, is there?" insisted the detective eagerly.

"I couldn't say. I give it as my opinion that I shall have to think it over purt' serious afore I can say one way or another."

"You don't claim," the detective said in some heat, "that there are so many fellows around here wearing platinum watch chains that you can't guess?"

"Oh, sugar! I wouldn't take so much for granted, if I was you, Mister. I don't

'low ary one o' them burglars belonged around here."

"How do you explain that address book?" snapped the other. "Left right on that ledge beside the vault door. And the combination written in it."

"Say, Mister," Tobias rejoined gravely, "seems to me I ain't got to explain it. You are the detective, not me. I've come across lots of things in this world o' toil and trouble that I couldn't begin to explain."

"You're stalling," said the detective harshly. "That is what you are doing. And it won't help this fellow any. Where is he? Have you seen him around here this morning?"

"I cal'late I ain't," said Tobias, shaking his head. "Is it true what they say, that he's run away?"

A slow red climbed the lightkeeper's wind-tanned cheek. Even his hairy ear became inflamed. Lorna, who was watching him breathlessly, knew that this dark flush signaled wrath—and Tobias was not prone to lose his temper easily.

"Lemme tell you something, Mister Man," he finally rasped. "I give it as my opinion that you air one o' them 'dead-sure' fellows. You know more than the Creator that made ye—or you think you do."

"I'm here to investigate this burglary," interposed the detective.

"Investigate all you dern please!" exclaimed Tobias. "But don't you come here and try to trip me up, fur I'm purt' sure-footed. I've gone as far as I'm going to. That is, until I know more than I do now. That there book probably belongs to Mr. Ralph Endicott. That leetle gold knife may belong to him, too. Further than that I can't and won't say."

"They tell me down at the village that he's skipped out."

"I don't know nothing about that."

"Is that the house his folks live in—that second one up there on the bluff?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll go up there and see what they know about him. I guess I'll learn something."

"I cal'late you will," rejoined Tobias, with scorn. "I cal'late that if you see Professor Henry Endicott and tell him his nephew is a bank burglar you—an' Arad Thompson, too—will l'arn more than you expect. I shouldn't wonder."

The detective tramped away across the sandflat. Tobias secured his bandana and mopped his heated brow.

"Oh, sugar!" he murmured. "I ain't got no business bein' all het up this a-way. Won't nothing come of it. I give it as my opinion that fellow is purt' near half a fool!"

"But Tobias!"

He started and looked around. Lorna, pale and red by turns, suddenly clung to his shoulder.

"Tut, tut!" the old man muttered. "I'd forgot you was here, Lorny. Thought you'd gone upstairs to see Heppy."

"I—I am going. But I had to wait to hear what that man had to say. It's awful! Ralph——"

"Ain't no sense to that," interrupted Tobias with scorn. "O' course not."

"But that knife. It is his. I'm almost sure it is!" sobbed the girl.

"Oh, sugar! Wish't I'd never picked it up," complained Tobias. "Ain't nothing positive about it, I tell ye. I was too keen after a clue, I was."

"The book! That is surely his."

"Wal—yes. I cal'late. But it don't look sensible that he'd leave it there in the bank. Somebody picked it up, and put it there. Sure!"

"Tobias Bassett! how do you explain the combination being written in Ralph's address book?"

"Don't believe he ever wrote it there," the lightkeeper replied doggedly.

"Why, Tobias?"

"Them figgers don't look like what Ralph makes. I took a squint at some of his'n. Of course, folks writes diff'rent with a pencil from what they do with a pen 'most always. But, then——"

"Oh, Tobias! you are saying these things just to try to convince yourself—and me—that Ralph is not guilty."

"Oh, sugar! I don't have to convince myself of any such thing. I'd have to try mighty hard to made myself believe that he was guilty."

The young woman stared at him, her countenance very much troubled. She said at last slowly:

"There is no reason in your mind for a belief in his possible guilt, Tobias Bassett?"

"Nary reason," he declared in amazement.

"How about his poverty? If he is penniless? Suppose he needed a large sum of money to save him from trouble—from disgrace?"

"What the——"

The lightkeeper's eyes were staring—almost popping out of his head!

"I know it sounds terrible," moaned the young woman. "But if the Endicotts have lost all their money how do we know what financial trouble Ralph may be in? Oh! can't you *see*? He might have been desperately tempted. I hate to think of such a possibility. But——"

She burst into uncontrollable weeping at this juncture and, turning swiftly, ran into the house. Tobias had started erect upon the bench. It was several moments before he could utter any comment. Then:

"Now I have done it!" he ejaculated. "I've gone an' put my foot into it half-laig deep, and no mistake. I dunno. Mebbe Heppy's right. Enterin' in where angels

fear to tread has its dangers. I cal'late my matchmaking scheme was all right. But who'd have ever thought anything like this would turn up?

"Oh, sugar!"

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT FRETS LORNA

After some further consideration Tobias Bassett came to the conclusion that the startling suspicion regarding Ralph Endicott's connection with the burglary of the Clinkerport Bank was no joke.

That Lorna should actually fear there was truth in the accusation was disturbing enough. But the lightkeeper believed that by revealing to her his own ill-advised deceit in the matter of the Endicotts' financial situation, he could assuage Lorna's anxiety.

It seemed, however, that the public in general—and Clinkerport folk in particular—were likely to jump to the same conclusion that the bank detective and Arad Thompson held.

"It looks right silly, knowing the Endicotts as everybody about here does, and all," muttered the matchmaking lightkeeper. "But if ever that story I told Lorny gets spread abroad——

"Oh, sugar! Telling even a white lie is just like dropping oil on a woolen garment. It spreads, an' spreads——

"I give it as my opinion that if ever Heppy hears tell of my interferin' as I have in these young folks' love troubles, I won't never hear the last of it. Unless Heppy dies before I do—the Lord forbid!"

He sat there and watched the detective come away from the Endicott bungalow after a while. Rafe Silver had turned the car about and waited for the man at the foot of the lane. From where Tobias sat it looked as though the detective had not gained much by his visit.

"I doubt if he even see Henry Endicott," considered the lightkeeper, "he's that dissatisfied. I'd give something to know what that shabby looking sleuth thinks he'll do now. Trying to tie such a thing to Ralph Endicott. Oh, sugar!"

The big blue limousine went back to Clinkerport. The inhabitants of the town by this time were in a ferment. Thirty hours had elapsed—or thereabout—since the discovery of the burglary. The bank had not opened its doors

nor had Arad Thompson made a public statement.

Rumor and surmise scuttled through the narrow streets of the port like thunder-frighted fowl. Shopkeepers stood at their street-doors and housewives on their side porches. Gossip was rife and suspicion was bound finally to pounce hawklike on some victim.

Who first tarred Ralph Endicott's name with the brush of suspicion seemed a mystery. Only Silas Compton and Ezra Crouch had seen the little gold penknife Tobias had found under the bank window. The bank president had spoken to nobody save the detective about the toy, and the sleuth was as close-mouthed as a clam.

Yet when the latter arrived back at Clinkerport the whole town seemed to know about that knife, and most of the excited inhabitants were quite positive that it belonged to Ralph Endicott.

"You kin believe it or not, as ye see fit," Ezra Crouch was saying to a group of soap-box warmers in Compton's store, "his going away the other day was all a bluff. Just a bluff. He was back again that night."

"Prob'bly. If he was one of the burglars," commented the storekeeper.

"Of course he was one of the burgulars. He was like enough the ring-leader of 'em," declared Ezra.

"I never did like that feller much," breathed one easily convinced listener.

"Too uppity," said another.

"All them Endicotts is proud as Punch," declared a third.

"Here! Here!" cried Compton. "You fellers air jumpin' at a conclusion that's got mighty leetle evidence behind it. Ye air grabbing at it just like a snapper at a sandworm. You ain't sure he come back after he left town, bag and baggage, day 'fore yesterday."

"Yes, I be," said Ezra, nodding. "He was seen. As late as ten o'clock that night. Right here on Main Street."

"Ye don't say!" was the excited chorus.

But Silas Compton was not so easily convinced. He snorted and looked over his spectacles at Ezra, balancing back and forth on his soap-box as perky as any catbird.

"There ain't no sense in it," declared the storekeeper. "What need of that rich feller robbin' a bank?"

"He ain't rich," cackled Ezra Crouch. "It's his uncle—that crazy inventor. He's got all the money. Not this boy."

"What's the difference?"

"A good deal, I cal'late," declared the confident Ezra. "Mebbe he had need of a lot of money that his uncle wouldn't give him. You know how them college boys air. Purt' tough, if ye ask me."

"But, my goodness!" gasped Compton, rather balked by the other's confidence, "nobody ever heard of anything like this against the Endicotts of Amperly—nossir!"

"There's most always a black sheep in every flock," replied Ezra, pursing his shaven lips. "At any rate, that there penknife Tobias found is his'n, and they tell me the detective Arad Thompson sent for is huntin' Ralph Endicott high and low."

This last was a fact. The detective had stronger reason than the finding of the penknife for making inquiries about Ralph. But the public did not know about the address book—not as yet.

It seemed peculiar that after all the friends Ralph was supposed to have made in Clinkerport, so few of them were in the front rank, so to speak, at this juncture. Zeke Bassett returned to the Twin Rocks Light that evening quite disturbed over this surprising fact.

"Does 'pear," he said to Tobias, when he entered the kitchen after putting away the car, "that Clinkerport folks is about as faithful to their friends as rock adders! Talk about warmin' a viper in your bosom, Tobias. Ralph Endicott has warmed a whole seine full o' vipers, seems to me. I never would have believed a nice feller like him could have made so many friends that turned out to be enemies when he got into trouble."

"Oh, sugar!" murmured the lightkeeper. "I give it as my opinion that Clinkerport folks is purt' average human—that's all."

But his face was grim enough as he listened to Zeke's further narration. It seemed the local police were working hand in hand with the detective, and their main effort seemed to be along the line of hunting Ralph and trailing his movements during the few days subsequent to the burglary.

"I don't know how much they think they've got on him," concluded the surfman. "But just now, before I come back, Gyp Pellet—— Know him, Cousin Tobe? Lives down to Peehawket."

"I know him," confessed the interested lightkeeper.

"Well, Gyp Pellet came up to town and told the constable and this here bank detective that he'd rented Ralph his catboat—the old *Gullwing*—early on the morning after the bank was burgled."

"Yesterday morning? Oh, sugar! What was Ralph doing down to Peehawket Cove?"

"Got me. Gyp says he seen him walkin' up the railroad tracks carrying a heavy bag about daybreak. O' course, everybody says he had the bank's money—or part of it anyway—in that bag. They kind of figger he and the other burglars went down the railroad on a hand car, and separated somewhere below Peehawket. Ever hear such foolishness?"

"It listens purty foolish," admitted Tobias.

"Gyp says Ralph was terrible anxious to get away in the *Gullwing*. Ye know that old cat ain't wuth the new caulkin' Gyp put into her seams this spring. And you bet he held out for his price, seein' Ralph was in need. He didn't exactly say how much he stung the young feller; but if he don't never see that old tub again, I reckon he don't cal'late to lose much."

"What do you s'pose Ralph is up to?" sighed Tobias. "He put out yesterday morning from Peehawket Cove, did he? And Gyp ain't got no idea where he went?"

"Says he tacked southerly after he got outside. Beyond that Gyp declares he don't know a thing."

"Wherever Ralph is, I hope he's moored safe to-night," muttered the lightkeeper.

He rose and went to the door, peering out into the darkness. The wind was moaning in the distance while the deeper bourdon of thunderous breakers on the reefs added to the audible threat of the elements.

"We're going to have a humdinger," said Tobias, with fuller assurance, returning from the door. "And if that boy went to sea in that leaky old tub——"

The door from the stairway was pushed wide open and Lorna Nicholet came into the kitchen. Her countenance was pale and there was a deep smudge under each eye. But the eyes themselves were very bright—perhaps tear bright. And yet she was not a girl who often wept.

She carried a tray on which was a teapot, crusts of toast, and part of a glass of jelly. Before she spoke she set the tray upon the Turkey-red cloth that always covered Miss Heppy's table between meals. Indeed, Zeke, making ready to go aloft for a look at the lamp, was first to ask:

"How's Cousin Heppy?"

"She managed to eat a little supper. She is quiet now," Lorna said. "Is the bank matter settled? That is what is worrying Miss Heppy. If her money is lost——"

"Oh, sugar!" muttered the lightkeeper, while Zeke shook his head.

"Arad Thompson ain't let out a peep," the surfman declared. "I don't suppose he wants to shoulder all the loss. I don't know anything about the law on it."

He went out to the stairs and closed the door behind him. Lorna turned like a flash upon the old lightkeeper.

"Tobias Bassett!" she ejaculated, "what is it now about Ralph?"

"Heh?" She had managed to startle him that time. "Why, Lorna, I don't know——"

"What has happened to him? I heard you say something about his going to sea. What do you mean?"

"Why, there's a story that he went out from Peehawket Cove in a catboat

yesterday morning. But we don't know what he went for, or where he's gone."

"I heard you say it was an old tub. If he is out there and there is a storm coming up, what is going to become of him?"

"Oh, sugar! Ralph's a good sailor. You know he is. He wouldn't likely run into no danger. When he see the storm coming he'd run for it somewhere. Sure!"

"And where would he run, if he knew that the police were looking for him in every port up and down the Cape?" demanded the young woman.

She brought out the question pantingly and one hand clutched at her bosom. Tobias stared. That Lorna Nicholet should display such abundant emotion puzzled him.

"Good glory, Lorna!" he gasped. "Air *all* women alike? You talk about Ralph just the same as Heppy does about our money. Ain't a spark o' hope in either of your hearts, I don't believe. You talk like you was sure Ralph is mixed up in that burglary."

"He is, isn't he?" she demanded with sharpness. "At least," she supplemented, "he is accused."

"I never thought, Lorny," the lightkeeper rejoined gravely, "that you'd go back on an old friend this-a-way. Why! if Ralph's friends are going to believe such tommyrot about him, no wonder strangers—as ye might call 'em—air so fickle."

"What do you mean, Tobias Bassett? Haven't we reason enough to be suspicious of him?"

"I can't see it, Lorny."

"Why! That penknife! And that address book! What of them?"

Tobias shook his head, puckering his lips thoughtfully.

"And see how he has acted! Going off without telling anybody where he is bound, or what he means to do. Oh! even if he isn't guilty, I've no patience with him."

"I kin see that," admitted Tobias reflectively.

"There is more than that. You know there is!" cried Lorna, on the verge of tears at last. "He—he has lost his money and he may be desperately in need of some for—for a certain purpose. How do we know what temptation he may have been under these last few weeks? I—I feel condemned! I should have offered to help him!"

She said it wildly, and fairly ran out of the kitchen again before Tobias could recover his powers of speech. On the stairway she stopped to wipe away her tears. Were they tears of rage, or of actual fear for Ralph Endicott's safety? Lorna could scarcely have told had she been asked.

In her pocket was a crumpled bit of paper—a leaf torn from that very address book which now seemed to be plain evidence against Ralph Endicott. He had torn it out in anger and thrown it at Conny Degger—the page on which was written

Cora Devine's address. The very thought of that girl stabbed Lorna to the heart!

For, deny it as she would, Lorna was jealous. She was enraged that a girl of that character could attract, even for a little while, a man who had been *her* friend. With all his faults, Lorna had always considered Ralph manly and decent. That he should have found entertainment—even for a brief time—with a girl of such character!

It did not enter into Lorna's consideration that the only testimony she had as to Cora Devine's character came through Conny Degger. And at the present moment she would not have taken Degger's word as final on any subject.

What she thought she knew, however, had festered in Lorna's mind until it discharged nothing but evil suspicion against Ralph. Shrewd Conny Degger had said just enough to turn Lorna's milk of human kindness acid. At least as far as Ralph was concerned.

She finally climbed the stairs to Miss Heppy's whitewashed cell. The old woman had fallen asleep at last. She sobbed now and then into her pillow, like a heart-broken child.

"Poor Miss Heppy!" the girl murmured. "The loss of that money spells tragedy for her. It is almost the greatest blow that could have befallen her."

But she was not exactly thinking of Miss Heppy's trouble—not in particular. She sat down at the little table on which stood the shaded lamp. There was a bottle of ink on the table with a penholder and a rusty pen in it. There was a cheap box with "Elite Writing Paper" ornately printed on it. She took out a sheet of paper and an envelope.

Very slowly, and with much thought between phrases, Lorna wrote a letter and addressed it to "Miss Cora Devine, 27 Canstony Street, Charlestown, Mass." Afterward, Miss Heppy having fallen deeper into sleep, Lorna turned down the wick of the lamp and crept out of the room.

There was nobody in the kitchen when she descended the stairs, Tobias having joined Zeke Bassett in the lamp room. Lorna slipped into her jacket and wound a veil about her head. Outside the boom of the surf and shrieking of the wind frightened her. A fierce storm was gathering. If Ralph was out in a small boat in this hurricane——

She fought her way across the sands and climbed the bluff. There was a light in Jackson's room over the garage. It was not yet ten o'clock, and a mail train went through Clinkerport just before eleven.

She called to the chauffeur. He came down immediately and was only too willing to do her errand. The letter was to be stamped for special delivery and

was to be mailed on the train.

CHAPTER XXIII

MORE THAN WEATHER INDICATIONS

August seldom breeds such a gale along the Cape Cod coast as this threatened to be. At that date the Life Saving Service was administered more economically than it should have been.

But duty is a high mark—and always has been—to the men in this service. The threat of this mounting gale called the Lower Trillion crew together on their own responsibility. Not long after midnight Zeke Bassett left the Twin Rocks Light, got out his little car, and ran down to the station to see if the captain had need of him.

Zeke returned for early breakfast at the light and to get some of his chattels that he needed. Hurricane signals were out all along the coast, and although Captain Edgar of the Lower Trillion station would not send out beach patrols, he was glad to have his crew within call. The wind was out of the northeast and had already spun the gauge to sixty-five miles an hour.

"We've been overhauling the gear and soaking up the old lifeboat since mid-watch," said Zeke between huge mouthfuls of Tobias's johnnycake and fried pork. "I dunno why the Service don't give us a power boat. They've got one at Upper Trillion. But there's a whole flock of millionaires up there that have got influence with Congress. Huh!"

"I give it as my opinion that money does have some influence sometimes."

"Say, speakin' of money! That reminds me. Jefferson Gallup—he's Number Six on our crew—gave us a different line on that Endicott boy this morning."

"Oh, Ralph?"

"Yes. Seems he did go to sea in the *Gullwing*. Jefferson was out with his brother-in-law in the sloop fishing, and they spied Endicott and the cat going out and coming in last night. He was hanging around the jaw of Cape Fisher. He's a good sailor, Jefferson says."

"I cal'late," agreed Tobias, wagging his head. "But what was he doin' out there?"

"Course," said Zeke, reflectively, "at that time Jefferson Gallup hadn't heard a word about the bank burglary. Comin' in they ran close to the *Gullwing* and

hailed Endicott—asked him what he was loafing around there for. He didn't 'pear to have no fish."

"And what did he say?" asked Tobias eagerly.

"Why, he shouted something about waiting there to spy the *Nelly G.*"

"The *Nelly G.*?" repeated Tobias. "Why, she's a Banker."

"Yep. Hails from New Bedford. I heard tell she was making an early start for the Georges. And it seems, from what Jefferson Gallup gathered, that Ralph Endicott was cal'latin' on going with her."

"Oh, sugar!" exclaimed the lightkeeper. "Of course. He's said to me more than once that he'd admire to take a trip on one o' them haddockers. But why didn't he go down to New Bedford and board her proper?"

"I cal'late," said the sober Zeke, "that other folks is goin' to ask that same question, Tobias Bassett. If he boards that schooner he's got to abandon the *Gull-wing*. And I bet he paid Gyp Pellet every cent she's worth for the use of her. Looks suspicious."

"There you go!" ejaculated Tobias, with heat. "That boy never did value money. If he wanted to do a thing he'd do it, never mind if it cost him his last cent."

"Wal," was the dry response, as Zeke got up from the table, "if Endicott had in that suitcase what folks say he had, I reckon it didn't cost him his last cent to satisfy even such a hog as Gyp Pellet."

Tobias wagged his head and said nothing further. He was more puzzled than ever now. It did look as though there was something peculiar about Ralph's departure from home.

The old-lightkeeper would not believe anything against the character of the boy he had watched grow up and loved so well. He knew Ralph Endicott was not perfect; but he was "toler'ble sure," as he expressed it, that Ralph was no bank burglar.

He was as anxious now over the absent youth as Lorna was, and Lorna had spent a most unhappy night. She arose on this wild and turbulent morning unable to hide from even the casual glance the traces of tears and sleeplessness.

And Miss Ida's glance was never casual. The moment Lorna slipped into the breakfast room—a wee bit late, perhaps—her aunt looked up from behind the coffee percolator. She was saying:

"I do wish John Nicholet would return. All I get is a scrawl here," she tapped the letter beside her plate, "saying that he may be delayed a day or two longer in Boston. I am worried, Lorna, about Prof—about the Endicotts. If only Ralph had not gone away I certainly would put the question to him frankly. If the family is in financial difficulties—— What is the matter, Lorna?"

Her tone was sharp. For once Miss Ida's calm was fretted by her niece's

appearance.

"Are you ill?" she cried.

"Why, no, Aunt Ida."

"What is the matter then?"

"I—I—oh, Auntie! The Clinkerport Bank! They say Ralph robbed it!"

"They say—— Are you crazy, child?"

"No, no! It's true!"

"What is true?" demanded Miss Ida, her cheeks actually reddening. "Do you mean to tell me, Lorna Nicholet, that you for one instant believe such a vile calumny about Ralph Endicott?"

"But—but the police are hunting him. He has run away. He hired a boat down at Peehawket Cove and nobody knows where he has gone in it."

"What has that to do with the bank robbery?" asked Miss Ida severely.

Finally Lorna recovered her voice sufficiently to give a detailed account of the events connecting Ralph's name with the burglary. Miss Ida listened with haughty impatience. When her niece had finished the spinster actually snorted—no other word just expresses it!

"Lorna! I think you are a fool," she declared. "If Ralph told me himself he had committed a burglary I should not believe it."

"You do not know what temptation he may have had," faltered the girl.

She would not breathe a word regarding Cora Devine and her fear that Ralph might have been hounded for a sum of money that he could not honestly obtain. It was not that Lorna was really convinced Ralph was a thief. She feared that the general suspicion that had settled upon him might be supported by seeming evidence. If he was brought to arrest, what then?

Miss Ida arose from her seat, leaving her breakfast almost untouched.

"I am going to see Henry Endicott at once. He must take me into his confidence, as John is not here. If this bitter humiliation comes upon him at such a time—when he must be already overwhelmed with trouble—no knowing what the result may be."

"But he is shut up in his laboratory. He even sleeps there. You can't talk to him, Aunt Ida."

For once Miss Ida spoke impulsively. Indeed, she fairly blazed the reply at her startled niece.

"I am not afraid of Henry Endicott or of his foolish orders about being let alone when he is at work. Once I might—well, this is a different matter. I am not a silly girl, I hope. Henry Endicott must be dragged out of his shell if need be!"

She made her exit, leaving Lorna wondering just whom Miss Ida had referred to. Was the "silly girl" mentioned Miss Ida or Lorna? Was it possible that her aunt harked back to an incident of her past association with Professor Endicott

that Lorna knew nothing about?

She finished her own breakfast hastily and then got into her storm coat and boots. She had promised the lightkeeper's sister to go this morning and put in order the living rooms in the light tower. But when she stepped out of the side door and felt the blast off the sea, Lorna was almost staggered.

The skyline, where it met and merged with the sea, was blue-black in hue, and the slate-colored clouds hung low. Racing shoreward the lines of white-maned waves seemed striving to overtake each other—running a handicap that left the observer breathless. The thunderous crash of the waves' recurrent breaking on the reefs was all but deafening. Lorna, beaten on like a leaf across the sands, had never experienced such a gale—surely not in midsummer—as this. It was frightful!

The greater powers of both wind and sea were unleashed. Not a spar was visible on all the wide expanse of tumbling sea. The hurricane had been long gathering, and the fishermen and other seafarers were forewarned.

Yet this poignant thought smote Lorna Nicholet's mind: Where was Ralph at this very moment? If he had remained outside in that leaky catboat, surely he had come to grief. Even large vessels must make plenty of searoom in such a gale as this, and the *Gullwing* surely was not a seaworthy craft.

She staggered to the door of the lighthouse and flung it open. Tobias Bassett was puttering about the stove. There was a smell of scorched toast in the air and the eggs he was trying to poach were being cooked to rags in a saucepan of furiously boiling water.

"My soul and body, Lorny! I sartainly be glad to see you. I thought mebbe you wouldn't get over, it's such a gale."

He did not notice her agitation, for his attention was fixed upon the maltreated eggs.

"I could cook once for a crew of haddockers good enough; but none of them was invalids. An egg is the loosest thing! I vum! how d'ye make 'em stay together, Lorny?"

But the almost breathless girl had that on her mind that precluded her taking any interest in culinary puzzles. She leaned against the door she had closed behind her, and gasped:

"What about Ralph? Have you heard anything more? Do you know if he is safe?"

"Why, I cal'late he is," the lightkeeper rejoined slowly, looking at her now with attention. "I don't know just why he put to sea out of Peehawket Cove 'stead o' going to New Bedford to jine the *Nelly G.*——"

"To join the *Nelly G.*?" repeated the young woman. "What for?"

"Going to the Banks, I cal'late. He let it be known that he was waiting

outside o' Cape Fisher for the *Nelly G.* to come along."

"He is running away, then!" cried Lorna.

"What do you mean?" said Tobias, forgetting the eggs entirely. "You ain't got no reason, Lorny, to think so bad of Ralph. He didn't have nothing to do with that bank robbery—nossir!"

"You cannot prove that, Tobias Bassett," she cried wildly. "You—you don't know all—all that might have tempted him. And he being without money."

"Oh, sugar!" muttered the worried lightkeeper, reddening like a schoolboy caught in a peccadillo. Then: "I tell you there ain't no reason. He ain't poor."

"Why, Tobias Bassett! if Professor Endicott has lost all his money——"

"But he ain't! It's all torn foolishness. I—I just told you I'd *heard* 'twas so, Lorny. And I did hear it. You know how gossip goes in Clinkerport. Them story-mongers has had Henry Endicott ruined financially because of his inventions a score of times."

"But you told me——"

"Oh, sugar! I didn't have no business to tell you such a thing. I never ought to have said it," stammered the lightkeeper. "I was figgerin' that the matter with you young folks—you and Ralph—was that you both had too much money. If you was poor I cal'lated you'd begin to have pity for each other and, as the feller said, 'pity is akin to love.'"

"Tobias Bassett, you deliberately deceived me? Ralph Endicott is not poor at all?"

Her face was suddenly aflame. Her eyes sparkled with rage. She stamped her foot. Tobias had no difficulty in keeping a straight face now. In truth he could not have called up a grin to save his life.

"That's just what I done, Lorna," he confessed. "I cal'late I trimmed my sails purt' close to the truth and no mistake. Didn't just foresee this difficulty, that's a fact. But you disabuse your mind right now of the idea of Ralph Endicott being anything different from what he's always been—as straight as a main stick and as clean as a whistle."

"But that penknife you found—and his address book?" she gasped.

"I ain't trying to explain them. I don't have to—just like I told that detective feller. I give it as my opinion that somebody is trying to tie something on Ralph. But no evidence they could show me would make me believe he was a bank burglar—nossir!"

Suddenly Lorna shrieked and ran at him. The old lightkeeper skipped out of her path with surprising agility.

"Aw—now—Lorny!" he gasped, "don't be too hard on a fellow."

"Tobias Bassett! Those eggs!"

"Oh, sugar! They be a mess, now, ain't they?" And he chuckled.

CHAPTER XXIV

UNDERSTANDING

It is admitted that those eggs saved Tobias Bassett from feeling the full weight of the young woman's wrath. And that is as well. For the eggs were by this time absolutely useless for any other purpose. One cannot poach eggs for twenty minutes and pronounce them edible.

"And this toast! What a black mess!" scolded Lorna. "The tea must have been boiling half an hour, too. Tobias Bassett, would you serve such a meal as that to your poor, sick sister?"

"Oh, sugar! I tell you I ain't no fancy cook, Lorny. I—I guess I'll go up and fill the lamp. Zeke ain't going to be with us to-day. My, my! hear that wind, will ye?"

He was glad to get out of the kitchen. That young woman, he opined, was some spitfire! But he chuckled hugely as he clumped up the stairs.

"I dunno whether my matchmaking is so tarnal bad, after all," he reflected. "She was scare't Ralph was in trouble because she does care for him—just as sure as aigs is aigs."

Perhaps, too, it was better for Lorna that she had to give her attention just then to the preparation of a more dainty repast for the invalid than Tobias could have furnished.

"Poor Miss Heppy!" she sighed.

Her thoughts reverted again to Ralph. So, he was not poor. He did not deserve the pity she had been wasting on him. Or was it wasted?

The fact that he had possibly not even the reason of poverty for entering into that scheme to rob the Clinkerport Bank did not, after all, clear him of suspicion. Lorna could not—as Tobias Bassett did—flout the evidence of the address book and the penknife. The atmosphere was not immediately cleared of doubt.

The young woman did not know much about judicial procedure or the laws governing circumstantial evidence; but she was quite sure that Ralph Endicott would have to explain away the discoveries at the bank that pointed so directly to his participation in the burglary.

And the curious thing he had done in leaving town! How explain that mys-

tery?

He had evidently shipped his trunk and taken the train himself for New Bedford; yet he had returned to Clinkerport during the evening. At daybreak he was walking the railroad track at Peehawket Cove. How had he got there from Clinkerport?

His putting to sea with the avowed intention of hailing the banker *Nelly G.* capped the mystery. Why had he not gone on with his baggage to New Bedford and boarded the fishing schooner there?

"And why? And why? And why?" murmured Lorna at length. "I might ask myself these questions from now till doomsday and be none the wiser."

She shook her head sadly as she prepared Miss Heppy's tray. These puzzling queries were not all—nor the greatest—that troubled Lorna Nicholet.

The young woman confessed in secret that more than curiosity inspired her interest in Ralph's association with Cora Devine. Why should her name and address have been in his notebook if he had not a close acquaintance with her?

From the very first time she had heard of the girl (and Conny Degger had mentioned her slurringly in connection with Ralph's name more than a year before) Lorna had felt secret jealousy. But never until now would she acknowledge it.

This phase of the mystery angered her. It was that which had caused her more than anything else to doubt Ralph's honesty and good intentions. So she still wondered if he were not really in trouble through the Devine girl and if this fact were not behind his strange actions in leaving home. Even if he had no part in the bank burglary (and of course he had not) Lorna could not absolve him of possible disgrace.

In addition, Ralph might be out on the open sea in this gale. Whether he had stuck to the leaky catboat during the night or had managed to board the *Nelly G.*, Lorna feared for his safety. She hoped, however, that he had given up that wild attempt to go to the banks with the fishing craft and had made safe harbor before the hurricane had risen to its present height.

The staunch tower of the Twin Rocks Light fairly quivered in the blast. Lorna could feel the vibration of the spiral stairway as she mounted to Miss Heppy's bedroom.

"What a dreadful storm! What a dreadful storm!" the lightkeeper's sister moaned when Lorna came into the room. "Dear-oh-dear! Everything seems to come on us to once't. Feel this old stone tomb a-tremble, Lorna! When there's a storm like this I always do dread trouble. And we've all got trouble enough now, I do allow."

"But, Miss Heppy, it may not be as bad as you think," said the young woman, trying to speak cheerfully.

"For love's sake!" was the rather tart rejoinder. "I've give up all hope of ever getting our money back. I guess Arad Thompson ain't responsible for burglaries. And I should think you'd be pretty well worrited yourself, Lorna, over Ralph Endicott."

"Oh!" gasped the girl in surprise.

"Yes. Tobias was in here this morning and told me what Zeke said. Ralph—the foolish boy!—has gone to sea. And in such weather! Oh, my dear, I long since told you why I'd never marry one o' these here longshoremen. 'Them that go down to the sea in ships,' the Bible calls 'em. Many of 'em go down *under* the sea in ships—ah, yes!

"Lorna, you are right to give up Ralph Endicott. Tobias says you ain't. He 'pears to think you two was made for each other. But if Ralph is so determined about seagoing I don't wonder that you give him over."

"But, Miss Heppy!" cried Lorna, "I am not at all sure Ralph cares particularly for me. I—I think he is all over that."

Miss Heppy, sitting up in bed with her nightcap awry, stopped sipping her tea for a moment to look over the cup at the younger woman.

"Be you blind, Lorna Nicholet?" she asked.

"Why, of course not!"

"You must be if you can't see that that boy is crazy about you. He goes mooning around here like a stray pup. I never did see anybody take it so hard as he does."

"Take what so hard?" demanded Lorna, with some exasperation.

"Your turning of him down the way you have," rejoined Miss Heppy more briskly. "Now, don't say you can't see it. Ralph Endicott isn't one that gets over a hurt easy. His feelin's air deep. Your running about with Mr. Degger just about finished Ralph."

"Why, Miss Heppy!" complained Lorna, "you are very much mistaken. He doesn't care anything about me at all. I know how he acts, I hope, when we are alone together——"

"You give him his orders long ago, didn't you?" said the shrewd old woman. "I heard you. Right here in this lighthouse."

"Oh! You mean that night we got stuck in the snowdrift?" The young woman flushed more deeply. "But I was angry. We were both angry."

"Uh-huh!" rejoined her friend.

"And I told you long ago that I would not allow the family to force me into a marriage that I did not want and with a man of whom my heart did not approve."

"I know—I know, my dear," said the old woman, nodding. "And I am not blaming you. Besides, I do think Mr. Degger is an awful friendly young man."

Lorna winced at this. Her head was turned so that Miss Heppy could not

see her face.

"Somehow, Tobias don't seem to like Mr. Degger," went on the lightkeeper's sister. "But I never did think all the wisdom in the world was lodged under Tobias's sou'wester. No, indeed! You have a perfect right to say no to Ralph. But that don't keep me from being sorry for him, just the same."

"I am quite sure you are mistaken, dear Miss Heppy," Lorna rejoined seriously. "I mean about Ralph's caring anything for me—in that way. Of course we are friends. I—I should feel very bad if I thought he was in danger."

"And he certainly is, my child, if he is out in this gale," groaned Miss Heppy in her most lachrymose manner. "Ain't a mite o' doubt of that."

Lorna carried away the tray, urging the old woman to remain in bed for the day. Even if Miss Heppy's illness was mostly of the mind, resting in bed would do her more good than any medicine. But Lorna was glad to have the work of clearing up the house on her hands. Bodily exercise eased *her* mind.

Tobias Bassett kept strictly away from the living rooms for most of the forenoon. He knew himself to be in bad odor with the black-eyed girl, who, swathed in one of Miss Heppy's voluminous aprons, briskly went about the homely tasks.

Tobias came down about noon for some tools. He no longer looked sheepish, nor did he grin when he beheld Lorna's very serious face.

"I give it as my opinion that this is the worst summer storm we ever had," the lightkeeper said. "I'm a-getting anxious, I am."

"Is there anything in sight, Tobias?" she asked him fearfully.

"Meaning any sail? I should hope not! I don't want to see no craft inshore with the wind in this quarter—nossir! I'm in trouble 'nough, as it is. I never see the beat on it. Just when Zeke is away, too."

"What has happened?" she asked.

"I'm 'fraid one o' the plates o' glass up there will blow in. The copper flange holding it is weakened—I dunno but it's giving way. Why! if that should happen we couldn't mebbe light the lamp to-night. She'd blow out or explode."

"Oh, Tobias!"

"I've got to try to fix it," he said, finding the hammer and cold chisel in the cupboard. "But it ain't no one-man job."

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Wal, ye might. If Heppy was only up and about she'd give me a hand."

"I can help you just as well as Miss Heppy," Lorna declared with confidence.

She followed the old man up the spiral stairway with lighter tread. The higher they went the louder in Lorna's ears sounded the pæan of the gale. The tower trembled through all its height. The thunder of the breakers down below was, too, a threatening sound.

They reached the lamp room. The wind seemed to burst against the glassed front of the room. There was such a creaking and rattling of joints and of window frames that Lorna was actually frightened. She cowered for a moment at the back of the room, her hands over her eyes. If Ralph was out in this awful storm!

"Here ye be, Lorny!" shouted the lightkeeper. "See if you can give me a hand."

She ventured forward. At first she scarcely dared look out across the sea. The spectacle of lowering masses of cloud with the white scud flying beneath and the foaming billows racing landward shook the girl's very soul. The drum-beat of the breakers at the foot of the tower seemed to menace it.

"Oh! aren't we in danger up here?" she cried.

"I cal'late the old Light will stand some pounding yet," Tobias grimly replied.

She read the words on his lips rather than heard them. She dragged her attention from the view without to the work of repair that Tobias was engaged in. The pressure of her hand above and below the point on the broad flange where he was tapping was just the aid needed.

"That's it, Lorny. You're as good at a pinch as ary boy. If we can keep this sheet of glass from shaking out of the frame——"

"Oh, Tobias!" she gasped, "it is dreadful! I never imagined the power of the wind was so great."

"I cal'late this is some gale," he agreed. "And if the wind don't shift before the tide turns, the sea's going to roll in here clean across the flats. She'll pour over the reefs in a reg'lar flood."

"Oh, never, Tobias!"

"I believe 'twill," he repeated. "We're likely to have such another high tide as we had in ninety-eight. Our cellar was full then, and no mistake."

"Why, Tobias Bassett, there isn't any cellar to this lighthouse."

"Oh, sugar! So there ain't. Ne'r mind. It would have been full if we'd had a cellar," he chuckled. "And this comin' tide may be like it. It'll maybe wash out the shell road. It did that time."

"Then I would better hurry home. I may be marooned here all night if I don't."

"Wal, maybe so. But you're welcome to stay, and I guess Miss Ida won't worry none about ye."

When Lorna ran downstairs she felt, after all, that she could not leave Tobias alone to fumble with the housekeeping. He had all he could do unassisted to attend to the light.

"And poor Miss Heppy in bed," the girl murmured. "I'll get dinner for them anyway before I go. An invalid would fare poorly in this tower to-day with only Tobias about."

No staples were lacking in the lighthouse pantry, and Lorna was a capable housewife. Her culinary attempts might not match Miss Heppy's, but the latter praised her willing helper.

"I dunno what I should have done without ye, Lorna," she declared. "I just felt as though I was all in. I couldn't lift a finger to help myself, nor Tobias either."

"I am not sure that you shouldn't have a doctor, even now, Miss Heppy," the younger woman observed.

"For love's sake! What do I want a doctor messin' with me for? Doctors air for broken bones and young children. Common sense is the only doctor I've had for a good many years. And I know as well as you do, Lorna, that there ain't nothing re'lly the matter with me, only worriment. I'm an old fool, and that's all there is to it! But it does seem as though I couldn't begin all over again, saving the pennies and going without, and stinting ourselves. We'll end in the poorhouse, Tobias and me, like enough. Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

She concluded with a sob, and Lorna stole out of the room. There was nothing she could say that would really comfort Miss Heppy. She had, as Tobias said, "let go all holts." If the money was actually lost, the young woman pitied Tobias as much as she did Miss Heppy. The latter was going to be more lachrymose than ever.

"Perhaps Tobias is more than half right," Lorna thought, as she bustled about her work. "They never have had any good of the money they scrimped so hard to save; or of Captain Jethro's legacy, either. Just knowing it was in the bank was no very great satisfaction. And now it *isn't*!"

She prepared a hearty meal for Tobias, who ate gratefully but in a more serious mood than he was wont to display. He went up to the lamp room again as soon as the meal was over.

"There don't seem to be any let-up in sight," he told Lorna, "and I feel like I'd ought to be right on the job, as the feller said."

She cleared away and washed the dishes. All the time the booming of the breakers and the crash of the wind against the trembling light tower made unhappy music in her ears.

She went to the door to look out. The sand barrens were being most viciously beaten by both wind and spray. She dreaded the walk back to Clay Head. When she went she thought she would better follow the shell road even if it was much the longer way home. Not a moving object appeared in the near-by landscape.

Suppose Ralph had boarded the fishing schooner? It was now probably far out to sea. Any craft must make a good offing in such a hurricane to be safe.

Ralph's possible peril kept recurring to the girl's anxious mind. The accusation that he had helped in the bank burglary might, in the end, prove ridiculous.

But his peril from the elements could not be gainsaid.

Yes, she was angry with Ralph. He had shown, she thought, little appreciation of her personal attractions that day when they returned in his motor boat from Lower Trillion after the black squall. Lorna had been in a tender mood that afternoon and Ralph—he had practically ignored her!

That she had forbidden him to display any lover-like attitude toward her did not enter into Lorna's consideration. There are times when even the most practical young woman does not expect a man to believe she means what she says.

In addition, the spectre of Cora Devine continually rose in Lorna's thoughts. There was a mystery between Ralph and that girl. It had to be explained before Lorna could readmit her old friend to her confidence.

When Lorna climbed the stairs once more to the lamp room it was mid-afternoon, and she realized that darkness would shut down very early upon sea and land. Already Miss Heppy's chickens had gone to roost. Lorna had beaten her way out to the coop to feed them and found them cowering upon their perches. There was the element of threatening disaster in the very air.

As she came up into the lamp room the turmoil of the gale seemed to have increased tenfold. One could not have stood in safety upon the narrow gallery outside the windows.

Tobias had his old-fashioned "captain's glass" to his eye—an ancient telescope that had been round the world on many a voyage—and held it focused on a point some miles to the southward.

"What is it, Tobias?" Lorna asked, coming close to him before he realized her presence.

"I give it as my opinion that it is a craft of some kind, and she's making heavy weather of it. But I can't make out if it's a two-stick or a three-stick vessel. Seems to have lost some of her gear for'ard."

He allowed Lorna to take the heavy glass and aided her to fix upon the exact spot where, now and then, the masts of the laboring vessel heaved into view.

"Is she in danger, do you think, Tobias?" Lorna asked.

The question was expressed in her countenance, and Tobias nodded. "Naterally!" he mouthed with vigor. "Any sort o' craft is in danger so near shore. I warrant the boys air watchin' her down to Lower Trillion. She's about off their station now.

"Come on," he added, putting the glass away in its beckets and starting for the hatchway. "Let's go below for a spell." He did not want the girl to watch that staggering, gale-buffeted craft out there. "I feel sort o' famished for a cup o' something hot. Heppy usually has her teapot on the stove about this time, and she's gettin' me purt' near broke in to liking that old maid's tipple," and he chuckled.

But when they descended to the kitchen Tobias chanced to peer out of the window overlooking the road first of all. He ejaculated:

"My soul and body! what's come to pass now, I want to know?"

Lorna ran to look over his shoulder. The big blue limousine belonging to the bank president had just halted before the lighthouse. The shabbily dressed detective was getting out.

"Oh!" Lorna cried. "What can he want here again?"

"I cal'late he thinks this is a bubblin' fount of information," grumbled Tobias. "Huh! But maybe we'll l'arn more than he does, Lorny."

They did. The detective entered unsmilingly when the lightkeeper opened the door.

"Have you heard anything more of that young Endicott?" he asked Tobias, merely nodding to the young woman.

"Wal, nothing that ye might call authoritative," the old man said slowly. "There's rumors——"

"Yes. We've run some of them down. He was mixed up in that break at the bank as sure as guns," the detective interposed with much assurance.

"Oh!" gasped Lorna, sitting down suddenly.

The man flashed a glance at her that seemed questioning; but he continued to address Tobias.

"We have learned that he is a pretty shrewd fellow—up to a certain point. All these crooks fall down at some place or another."

Again Lorna spoke. "How dare you?" she demanded, but under her breath.

The man gave her another swift glance but made her no reply. He went on coolly to Tobias:

"He planned his alibi with some smartness. Shipped his trunk to a New Bedford wharf where a fishing schooner called the *Nelly G.* was tied up. Sent it on his ticket. But he slipped off the train and came back to Clinkerport in the evening. This was the night of the robbery, you understand."

"How do you know all this?" demanded the young woman, with strong emotion.

"Well, the chap that first put me wise to it was a fellow named Degger. Stopping at the hotel in town. Oh, he knows Endicott well," added the detective confidently. "Went to college with him. That's where the boys show up their real characters oftentimes. They're away from home and cut loose from mamma's apron-strings. This Endicott certainly was a cut-up at Cambridge."

"So Degger says, eh?" muttered the lightkeeper.

"Oh, he only gave me the first steer. I soon beat up further evidence. And, anyway, he was back in Clinkerport late that evening," added the detective. "He was seen by more than one. It seems Endicott had about five hundred dollars in

the bank. He could not check it out over the bank counter so late, but he got the postmaster to cash his check for that sum."

"Five hundred dollars?" murmured Tobias. "Oh, sugar! That's a mort o' money to take with him on a fishing v'y'ge. Humph!"

"He's got more than that with him," said the other grimly. "But that's the reason he and his friends didn't blow the post-office safe. There was nothing left in it but the stamps. That young sharper cleaned up all the cash the postmaster happened to have on hand."

"Humph!" again repeated Tobias. "So he did all that, did he? And then?"

"Don't fret," said the detective airily. "We know about everything he did in Clinkerport that evening before the bank burglary. Yes, sir. He sent a registered package—let's see? Yes, here's the address. Do either of you know this woman?"

He thrust forward a card which he took from his vest pocket. Tobias did not offer to accept it, but Lorna leaned forward and repeated aloud the name and address:

"'Miss Cora Devine, 27 Canstony Street, Charlestown, Mass.'"

"There's always some woman mixed up in these affairs. This Devine girl is probably a crook's light o' love. I've put our Boston office onto her. Oh, we'll round up the whole gang before we get through."

"How about rounding up the money that was stole?" demanded Tobias with some disgust. "Seems to me that'd be more to the p'int."

"Don't you worry about that, either, old scout," said the detective. "We know where a part of the money is all right—the biggest share of it in all probability."

"Huh? Where?"

"In that suitcase this gay young Endicott took aboard that catboat down to Peehawket Cove," snapped the other.

"Oh, sugar!"

"And where is he and that catboat?" ventured Lorna, in a very small voice.

"According to report, the catboat is a wreck down there on what is called the jaw of Cape Fisher."

"Now, now, Lorny!" exclaimed Tobias, rising suddenly and going around the table to the young woman's side. "Don't you believe it!"

"Oh, to the best of my belief," the detective hastened to say, "Endicott abandoned the catboat. Over the long-distance 'phone, by way of Harbor Bar, I got the tip that Endicott did board that fishing boat, the *Nelly G.* I understand she is bound for the Grand Banks. That was his scheme for an alibi. He thought himself pretty shrewd, no doubt. But we'll get him yet."

"You're sure o' that, be ye?" sighed Tobias.

"Well, I'd bet money on it," rejoined the man with confidence.

"So he got aboard the *Nelly G.* after all?" ruminated Tobias.

"He was seen to by two witnesses. He had to abandon the catboat, the sea was so heavy. It was just before dark last evening."

"Oh!" and the lightkeeper comfortingly patted Lorna's shoulder. "Then she's well on her way to the banks. Of course."

"Don't be too sure of that," said the detective. "That is what brings me down this way. I am on my way to the Lower Trillion life-saving station. It is reported that the *Nelly G.* is in trouble somewhere off there. The wires are down, so that we could not communicate with the station direct. But a fellow was up from Peehawket—that old fellow that owned the catboat—and he came to the bank and told Mr. Thompson."

"You mean to say," Tobias asked hoarsely, "that the schooner's in trouble? This schooner that Ralph Endicott boarded?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. What's the matter with that girl?"

Tobias with flushed visage and angry eyes faced the detective. Lorna sat rigidly in the chair, her eyes closed, her face pallid.

"What did Gyp Pellet say? What's the matter with the *Nelly G.*?" demanded the lightkeeper. "She has been beating off and on all night and to-day. She has got distress signals flying. I am going down there to find out what it means. I guess that Endicott fellow won't get so far away, after all."

Tobias took both the small hands of the girl in his big one. He leaned above her, patting her shoulder tenderly. There was understanding in his attitude, as there was at last in Lorna's heart.

She no longer could deny the truth. Ralph Endicott was in dire peril if the *Nelly G.* was threatened with disaster. And she could not hide the fact that she loved him!

CHAPTER XXV

ACROSS THE YEARS

The Nicholets and the Endicotts had been sworn allies for generations. Their genealogical roots were entwined in early Massachusetts Bay history. Their forebears had perhaps helped each other burn witches and slaughter Indians in the ancient days. Basicly the families were even now as puritanical as the Sacred Codfish.

Yet under ordinary circumstances the Endicotts and the Nicholets, although

living side by side, would seldom think of interfering in—or even discussing—each other's private affairs. New England people are that way—the better class. Without being invited to do so Miss Ida would not have concerned herself in the Endicotts' financial difficulties except in this extraordinary situation.

The shocking story that Lorna had brought home—this utterly preposterous accusation against Ralph—quite startled Miss Ida out of the rut of usage. Although she had been consulted in their trouble by no member of the Endicott family, she felt that she must offer sympathy and—if possible—assistance. Although she seldom troubled her mind about financial affairs—leaving those details to her brother—Miss Ida was really the head of the Nicholet family. The bulk of the family wealth was hers, as well as the homestead at Harbor Bar.

She was in a position therefore to aid Henry Endicott privately, were he in need—as she believed he was. The professor's awkwardness when he had called on her several evenings previous, when he had really come to offer his assistance to Lorna's father, had served to convince Miss Ida that the Endicotts were in need.

For years everybody who knew him had said that Professor Endicott was wasting his substance in experiments that would never amount to anything of a practical nature. Miss Ida herself believed that he had frittered away much time and money since resigning as a young man from the chair of experimental chemistry in a mid-New England college.

Just what had happened twenty and more years before this present date to drive the wedge between Miss Ida and Henry Endicott no member of either family knew. A match that at the time was considered eminently fitting had suddenly become impossible. That was all anybody—save the two most interested persons themselves—ever learned about it.

It was years later, when Ralph and Lorna were half grown, that Professor Endicott and Miss Ida Nicholet began to agree on one important subject. The two families should be united through Ralph and Lorna. The young people, they both said, were made for each other.

That this statement had likewise been made *en famille* about themselves when they were young, Miss Ida and Henry Endicott perhaps had forgotten. At least—as has been shown—neither would admit to nephew and niece any good reason why the latter should not fulfill the arrangement.

On this particular morning Miss Ida was not thinking of her niece's opposition to being joined with Ralph Endicott in wedlock. She flung a shawl about her shoulders and wound a knitted scarf around her head to venture out into the gale. A less important errand than the one she had in view might have caused her to hesitate on the side porch. The gale off the water was all but breath-taking.

On a day like this Mrs. Lucy Markham would not leave her own apartment. The children would be in the playroom at the top of the house, as they could not

race the beaches below the clay cliff. Professor Endicott?

Miss Ida saw Jerome coming from the direction of the stable and garage, the main part of which building was devoted to the experimental laboratory. So she did not go to the house, but halted the old serving man on the walk.

"Where is Professor Endicott, Jerome?"

"He's in his study—I mean the laboratory, Miss Nicholet. He's just had me in to shave him, Miss. Isn't this a dreadful morning?"

"I wish to see the professor at once, Jerome," said Miss Ida, and hurried on without rejoinder to his question, such was her agitation.

When she turned the knob of the door the wind drove both the door and herself inward with a crash.

"Hoity-toity! What's this?" ejaculated the professor.

He stood at the sink with a towel in both hands, wiping his face dry after applying the shaving embrocation. He stared at his visitor over this towel as though she were an apparition.

"Miss Ida? My goodness! Let me shut the door." He sprang to it and put a sturdy shoulder to the barrier, for he was no weakling. "Do sit down, Ida. You are all out of breath. What has happened?"

He aided her to the swivel chair which stood before the desk he sometimes used. At first glance Miss Ida's fingers itched to set it to rights. It was heaped with papers and books and retorts and glasses, as well as a multitude of riffraff.

Professor Endicott stood off from her and stared. He was without coat or vest. There was a much warmer expression in his eyes now that they were not veiled by the shell-rimmed spectacles he usually wore.

"What has happened, Ida?" he asked again.

"It is about Ralph," she told him, having recovered her breath if not her tranquillity.

"Oh? Yes. Ralph," he murmured.

He looked puzzled, but he searched and found among the papers on the desk an unfolded letter ("How could he place it in that mess?" was Miss Ida's thought) and looked at it attentively.

"I found this tucked under the door after Ralph had gone away, it seems. To tell the truth, Ida, I have been too deeply engaged recently to attend to any exterior matters. Let us see, when was it I saw you last? Has John returned from Boston?"

"No, John has not returned," she said coldly. "I know you have shut yourself up here. I do not see how you dare make a recluse of yourself. How do you know what is happening to your family?"

"Oh! I—— There is Cousin Luce, you know."

"Yes. I know and you know just how much of a housekeeper and man-

ager she is!" ejaculated Miss Ida. "It cannot truthfully be said that Lucy Markham neglects your brother's family—and you. For she never in this world paid any attention to such a duty. How you expect the younger children will grow up——"

"Oh, now, Ida. They seem to get along very well," he demurred. "Healthy and happy and all that. And Ralph—— By the way, this letter now—— I have neglected something which he reminds me of in this. But, believe me, these final experiments have been most enthralling.

"You must know, my dear Ida, that I have been associating myself with certain government chemists. They come to me when they can get no further in their experiments. We have finally completed a chemical formula that will revolutionize the expansion of balloons—if you know what I mean? It is a lighter and positively un-inflammable gas.

"My royalties will be rather large. Not that I have aided our government solely for a monetary consideration," he added parenthetically. "But our income will be quite doubled by these royalties I have agreed to accept."

"What?" gasped Miss Ida, so astounded that she was more than abrupt. "You say—you make *money*—from these—these——?"

She stared around at the littered place. Mentally, on entering, she had called it a pig-sty!

"Oh, yes. I have made quite a lot of money in the past. Much more than I ever could have obtained from a salaried position. But nothing like these royalties from this last invention. Of course, it is commercial, in a way, and the Endicotts have never been commercially inclined. But, then——"

"Henry Endicott!" she breathed, "then you are not in—in financial difficulties?"

"Financial difficulties? Not at all! Not at all! Far from it, I may confidently say. Indeed, my dear Ida," and he flushed painfully, "I am so situated that if you—if John—— That is, if you would allow me, as an old and tried friend——"

"Well?" demanded Miss Ida, sitting very straight in the chair and looking at him most uncompromisingly it seemed.

"Why, I—— You see, my nephew says here," the professor hastily went on, referring to the paper in his hand. "Ahem! Let me see. Yes. 'I am going on a voyage with Captain Bob Pritchett on the *Nelly G.* No! That is not the place. Oh, here: 'Look out for Lorna, Uncle Henry. See her father just as soon as he gets home. If they need help you know whatever I have they are welcome to.'"

Miss Ida rose to her feet in a flame of indignation.

"What under the sun does the boy mean?" she asked haughtily. "Such impudence! Does that mean, Henry, that Ralph has defaulted in the understood arrangement that he and Lorna were to marry? I thought that it was entirely my niece's fault that her engagement to Ralph was not yet announced."

"Does that sound cold, Ida?" rejoined the professor earnestly. "The boy offers all he possesses to help Lorna—and you—in your trouble."

"Our trouble! What trouble? I do not know what you mean."

The professor broke through his restraint at last. Ralph's letter fluttered to the floor. He seized Miss Ida's hands.

"There, there!" he said. "We know all about it, Ida. Nobody can feel more sympathy for you than Ralph and I. I hoped to see John Nicholet and talk it over with him. It would have been easier—for both you and me.

"This is something that you cannot bear alone, Ida. Let me help. God knows I, like my nephew, and for a greater reason, would gladly give you every cent of my personal fortune——"

"Henry Endicott!" she finally gasped vehemently. "Do you think we need financial assistance?"

But she did not withdraw her hands from his grasp. She looked into his face (she was almost as tall as he was) with a strangely tender expression flooding her own countenance.

"So the story goes, Ida," he said gently. "Hasn't John met with some heavy losses? Or don't you know about it?"

"Nothing of the kind!" she cried. "It is ridiculous. And you—— Why! we were told—— Where could Lorna have heard it? We believed you had lost the greater part of your property. I came over here this morning to offer assistance. I was afraid you had shut yourself up here in this awful place, worrying over your losses. Oh, Henry!"

Suddenly he smiled. Like Ralph's, the professor's smile was a most winning one. But it was not wholly the warmth of that smile that drew the woman closer to him.

"Ida," he said, in some wonderment, "would you have done that for me?"

"We—we have been friends so many years, Henry."

The flush in her cheek was like a girl's, but she did not drop her gaze. She met his look squarely.

"So many wasted years, Ida," the man repeated softly.

"You don't seem to have wasted them after all, Henry," she breathed. "I only *thought* you were a waster. You know I always did despise any person who, in this busy and needy world, was non-productive."

Professor Endicott glanced about the laboratory. He shrugged his shoulders.

"All this is vanity, Ida," he said. "Financial gain is a very small part of life. We have existed, you and I, that is all—merely vegetated. What we should have had—what was meant for us—has been lost. We are bankrupt, Ida."

"No, no!"

His grasp of her hands relaxed. Her left hand stole up, up—across his shoul-

der and around his neck. She pressed against him and at last her gaze fell.

"No, no!" she whispered. "Not bankrupt, Henry. It is not too late——"

A little later Miss Ida raised her head from the professor's shoulder. Her eyes were tear-drenched, but her smile was warm.

"Henry," she said, "I had forgotten. Do you know that they accuse Ralph of helping to rob the Clinkerport Bank?"

CHAPTER XXVI

HIGH TIDE

Tobias Bassett for probably the second time in his life (the first occasion was when Conway Degger left the Twin Rocks Light) did not urge his visitor to lengthen his call. He followed the detective outside the door, however, and watched Rafe Silver get the blue limousine under way for Lower Trillion.

"I hope I see the last of you in this neighborhood right now," muttered the lightkeeper, referring to the detective. "You're a Jonah, that's what you are."

He went around to the exposed side of the tower and faced the wind, sheltering his eyes with his hand from flying spray and sand. He peered seaward.

"It's comin'," he thought. "I give it as my opinion that she's going to be a humdinger of a tide. Why, right now it's above usual high-water mark, and 'tis still two hours and more to full sea. It's comin'.

"And that schooner—if that is the *Nelly G.* we spied off to the south'ard—she's in a bad fix. No doubt on't. Oh, sugar! I wish that gal hadn't peeked through the old telescope and seen her."

He rather dreaded to return to the kitchen and face Lorna. Of course, he was free to admit, the girl had not shown that she really loved Ralph Endicott. For old time's sake, he told himself, she would be anxious for the young man's fate. But thus far she had not appeared as warmly interested in the absent man as the lightkeeper wanted her to be. Yet, somehow, Tobias felt if actual peril threatened Ralph, the girl "would take a tumble to herself." So he expressed it.

"Oh, sugar, yes!" he muttered. "She don't know just where she stands, that is all the trouble. It can't be possible them two young folks is going to drift apart same as Miss Ida and the professor did years ago—nossir! *I ain't goin' to let 'em!*"

Just how he expected to bring about the greatly-to-be-desired match he did not clearly see. He had stirred pity in Lorna's heart for Ralph when he had sug-

gested to her that the Endicotts had lost their wealth. Now that she knew this was not so, he wondered if the reaction in Lorna's mind would be disastrous for his matchmaking schemes. Pity was only akin to love sometimes.

"But, sugar! It don't always work out right, I do allow," grieved Tobias, wagging his head. "Women air ornery, I vum! Mebbe Lorna will turn right around t'other way and blame Ralph for what I done."

He returned to the kitchen therefore with lagging steps. Lorna was not there. It was growing dusk outside. On a night like this he often lit the lamp a little early. He would do so now—and had reason, with that craft he had spied wallowing in the offing.

He walked through the kitchen to the hall and started up the spiral stairway. He presumed Lorna was with Miss Heppy. But when he came to the first landing he distinctly heard a sound from the best chamber, the door of which was ajar.

He hesitated. It came again—the sound of a half-stifled sob and a murmured word. The old lightkeeper's heart was wrung with sympathy. He crept to the door.

It was Lorna. She had flung herself down beside the bed, her face hidden in her arms. Her shoulders quivered under the throe of her sobs. She was more wrought upon by emotion than Tobias had ever before seen her!

Kindly impulse urged the old man to enter and offer encouragement. His better judgment, however, held him back. He quite knew Lorna's nature. To display her deeper feelings in public had always been abhorrent to the girl.

The emotion that racked her now, Tobias realized, stirred Lorna's nature to its very dregs. As she rocked on her knees beside the bed, a cry burst from her lips which held the old man back:

"God, bring him back! Ralph! Ralph! Save him, dear God, for—for I love him! I love him so!"

The passion of tears that followed brought a lump into the lightkeeper's throat that all but choked him, while the salt drops stung his eyelids. He backed away from the bedroom door and tiptoed to the stairs.

He mounted softly to the lamp room. He felt that he had somehow been indelicate in listening to that cry of the girl's burdened heart. He had looked upon something which she had wished to keep hidden—a secret that Lorna had heretofore denied.

Tobias's weather-blown face was puckered into a very serious expression. Used as he was to the sea and sea-going, having taken a man's part in the trade all his days, Ralph's peril aboard the *Nelly G.* seemed a matter of course in his mind. His sister's inbred terror of the sea (shared by so many longshore women) made little impression on Tobias Bassett.

But the sudden revelation of Lorna's despair shook his calmness. He had loved her ever since she and Ralph had toddled along the beach in rompers, each

clinging to one of his hairy, tar-stained fingers. Now that she had grown to beautiful womanhood he was both fond of her and proud of her and had always considered that her growth and advancement was partly due to his watchful care during the long summers she had played along the beach.

Her deep concern now because of the gale and its threat began strongly to affect the lightkeeper. Under the depression of his discovery Tobias forgot to exult that at least half his matchmaking plans had come to fruition. Lorna loved Ralph!

If that was the *Nelly G.* out yonder—and he believed it was—and if Ralph was aboard her, what could he do to avert a calamity? Aside from his personal feeling for Ralph Endicott, the thought that Lorna was suffering, sobbing and praying in that whitewashed cell downstairs fanned into flame the lightkeeper's desire to help.

What could he do?

Tobias shook his head doubtfully. He took down the long telescope from its beckets against the rear wall of the lamp room and went forward to the great window. He had tightened the broad flanges that held the panes in place so that they no longer rattled. But there was no lessening of the voice of the gale. The rush of the wind past the vibrating tower still sounded a threatening tocsin.

Tobias adjusted the spy glass and focused it with practiced hand and eye upon the spot where the tossing masts of the laboring vessel heaved ever and anon into view. There was some lower canvas set. The craft was beating up the coast and was already much nearer the lighthouse than when he had last viewed it.

"She must be the *Nelly G.*," muttered the lightkeeper. "Ain't no two ways about it. But what can have happened to her? Bob Pritchett is a purt' good navigator, I do allow. I don't see, after he picked up Ralph (that must ha' been arranged between 'em by telegraph) why the *Netty G.* didn't go kiting out to sea, this gale comin' so plain and all!

"It's a puzzle. Mm-m! Easy enough to see, though, why the crew at Lower Trillion ain't done nothing for her even if she is showing distress signals. Puttin' out their old lifeboat in the teeth of this wind would be just about suicidal, I give it as my opinion.

"Now, if she continues to beat up this way and can claw off the Twin Rocks here, she might make the mouth of the bay in safety. Yep, I cal'late that is what Bob Pritchett is figgerin' on doing.

"He couldn't make the breach at Lower Trillion. It's too narrow. But if he can win past these reefs here and get into Clinkerport Bay, the *Nelly G.* will be as snug as a bug in a rug. That's whatever!"

The surges coming in over the reefs raised such a clamor now that Tobias knew his fears for a high sea would be realized. He touched off the lamp, early

as was the hour, waited only to see that the wick burned evenly, and then started below again.

As he went downstairs where the wind sounded less boisterously, the rush of the boiling surf up the strand and the sound of its retreat grew louder. He got into his slicker, buckled the throat-latch of his tarpaulin hat, and ventured out of doors once more. But he went no farther than the broad stone that lay before the door.

Up past the lighthouse raced a waist-high roller, to lap over the road and drain away into the cattail swamp on the other side. Its retreat tore away a full line of Miss Heppy's cockleshells that bordered the yard. Again the sea rolled in, and like a ravenous beast it tore and bit at the road's edge, guttering and washing away the sand and hard-packed shell in great mouthfuls.

"Dad fetch it!" ejaculated the worried lightkeeper. "I give it as my opinion that we're going to be purt' nigh surrounded by water afore this is over."

The waves were rolling in across the sands between the Light and the Clay Head. The road to Clinkerport would soon be shut off completely.

Tobias was aware that the door had been opened behind him.

"Oh, Mr. Bassett! That wave! Look at it! Why—why, I can't get home!"

"Cal'late you'll have to stay and throw in your lot with me and Heppy," he cheerfully rejoined. "But, sugar, Lorny! I guess the Twin Rocks Light will stand for a spell yet. We don't need to worry."

As he turned, smiling broadly, he saw that her face was haggard. Her eyelids were inflamed, and there were dark wales beneath the eyes. She looked at him pitifully.

"No, no, Lorny," he repeated, "we don't need to worry."

She gestured seaward. Her voice shook with emotion.

"But how about those out there, Tobias?" she whispered. "The schooner! What about her?"

CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT THE NIGHT BROUGHT

Hour after hour the billows rolled in over the barrier of the Twin Rocks reefs and guttered the sands and the highway beyond until the sea finally breached through the shell road and spread, waist high, upon the lowlands. No such unseasonable

tide had ever before been marked by the natives of the Cape. Even the "great tide of ninety-eight" had not reached this high mark.

Tobias remained with Lorna in the kitchen. It was useless for her to attempt to go home, even when the water receded. Tobias could not leave the light to attend her, and there was nobody else to accompany her to Clay Head.

So she set about getting their supper. They spoke of the tide and the wonder of it. It was now too dark to see anything at all in the direction of the sea, save where that ray of light streamed forth from the top of the tower. It was quite impossible even to observe the water boiling over the reefs.

"I give it as my opinion," said Tobias, "that them that's got small craft in the Cove yonder will find 'em either smashed along the inner side of the rocks or sunk. I know my dory's sunk long ago."

"Oh, not your *Marybird* or Ralph's *Fenique*, I hope!" cried Lorna.

"I put a spring on the motor boat's hawser," rejoined the lightkeeper. "And the *Marybird* is hauled up on the sand with a kedge out, bow and stern. I don't reckon she'll drag 'em, no matter how high the tide is. I would not want anything to happen to Ralph's craft—nossir!"

But their minds—neither Tobias's nor the girl's—were not fixed upon these things. Secretly both were concerned with the distressed fishing schooner, the *Nelly G.* What would this night that had now shut down bring to that imperiled craft?

Immediately after supper Tobias went up to the lamp again. But he came down quickly. He feared that Lorna might follow him.

When she asked him if he had seen the schooner's topmasts again, he shook his head. It was true. As far as he knew she might have gone down already. Yet he hoped. If she was beached, or being driven inshore, surely the crew of the *Nelly G.* would burn Coston lights or send up signal rockets.

Tobias, of course, could not think of bed on such a night as this. And Lorna was far too seriously wrought upon to join Miss Heppy upstairs. The lightkeeper suggested it, but she shook her head in positive refusal. She would keep watch with him. Every hour the old man climbed the stairs and searched the turbulent sea as well as he could by the light of the steady ray of the lamp. He owned no night glasses, and unless the endangered schooner came within range of the light's beam there would be small chance of spying her.

He saw no signal rockets. He could report nothing at all when he returned to the kitchen where Lorna continued to sit. If there was any hope at all, it lay in that fact. The *Nelly G.* must still be under control. She might, even, have wore off and made a greater offing. Yet he scarcely believed that possible with wind and tide as they were.

It was ten o'clock when the first startling incident of this never-to-be-

forgotten night occurred. Full sea was long since past and the tide had run out again over the sands. But the road was impassable for any vehicle. Tobias, lighting his pipe at the stove, suddenly desisted to cock his ear.

There was a sound outside other than that made by the gale and sea. Lorna heard it, too. She sprang up, but Tobias was first at the door. He opened it with care, for fear the wind would suck in and put out the lamp.

"Ahoy!" bawled a voice from the road.

"There's somebody in trouble out there, sure's you're a foot high, Lorny," the lightkeeper observed. "Fetch me my slicker. Got to see what they want."

He was out in half a minute, answering the hail in stentorian tones. The girl held the door open a crack to peer forth. She made out the bulk of some object in the roadway before the lighthouse door; but the wind whipped the flying sand into her face and she was forced to withdraw.

By and by there was a fumbling at the door. It was flung open and there appeared the wind-blown figure of the detective, his long rain-coat flapping about his legs. From outside Tobias bawled:

"You'll have to back around and run down to Ez Condon's, Rafe. His shed's the only shelter, I cal'late, that there is for a car. That's where Zeke keeps his when he's up here to the light."

Tobias clumped into the house. His face was quite as grim as that of the visitor.

"You've heard of the bad penny, Lorna," the lightkeeper said with sarcasm. "Here it is. Road's all torn up and they can't get that car of Arad's through to Clinkerport to-night."

"I am sorry to have to take advantage of your hospitality, Mr. Bassett," sneered the visitor.

"I cal'late you be," returned Tobias dryly. "But that's your own fault. You've made yourself sort o' disliked around here, and I'm frank to tell you so. But I wouldn't leave a dog stay out such weather as this. And Rafe——

"Why, do you know, Lorna," he added, turning to the girl. "Rafe Silver's got his hand in a sling. Broke his wrist, or something, trying to crank that big car down there to the station. The self-starter wouldn't work. Lucky old Cap Edgar is no slouch of a bone-setter."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" cried the girl. "But what about the *Nelly G.*?" she added, her hands clasped, and looking pleadingly from the lightkeeper to the detective.

The latter appreciated her emotion now. He answered in a much more sympathetic tone than he had used when he was previously at the lighthouse.

"She is still out there, and is not, they tell me, in immediate danger. If the gale drops she will be all right."

"But what's happened to her?" demanded Tobias. "Don't they know at the

life-saving station?"

"They made out her signals during the day. She lost her rudder, and they can't ship another in these seas."

"Oh, sugar! I should say they couldn't," agreed Tobias.

"She may pull through all right. They think her skipper is hoping to get into Clinkerport."

"I cal'late," observed Tobias nodding. "Well, Lorny, I reckon we can take hope of grace. If Bob Pritchett can beat off these sands till he claws around the p'int of the Twin Rocks, he'll make Clinkerport Bay, of course."

The door was flung open again. The little mahogany-faced Portuguese staggered in. It was plain to be seen that something fresh had happened.

"What is it?" cried Lorna, rising.

Even the detective turned from the stove to look at Rafe Silver. The latter spat out a word in his own tongue. Tobias laid a quick hand on his shoulder.

"Hey! What's happened to you now?" he demanded. "That wrist of yours——?"

But Silver writhed away, holding his injured hand well out of contact with Tobias. "Not me! Not me!" he shrilled. "Out there!"

He pointed seaward. The girl whipped about and reached the seaward window before any of them, jerking up the shade.

At the instant a red streak curved upward from the surface of the sea, far out from the shore. Another followed.

"Signal rockets!" murmured the lightkeeper.

"Oh, Tobias!" cried Lorna. "From the schooner?"

"That's what it is," muttered the detective.

Rafe was chattering to the lightkeeper in broken English. The old man seemed to understand him fully. He turned swiftly toward the stairs.

"It's the *Nelly G.*, all right," he flung back over his shoulder. "She's likely lost the sea-anchor they put out, and there ain't nothing to keep her from going on these rocks at last."

"Oh, Tobias!" gasped the girl.

"We've got to face it. No use trying to dodge the worst when it does come. If Ralph is aboard the schooner——"

"Oh, Endicott is aboard of her, all right," grumbled the detective. "I wish I was as sure of those yeggs that helped him rob the bank."

He sat down by the stove and continued to warm his hands. Rafe Silver followed the lightkeeper to the stairs and, in a moment, with a glance of disdain at the detective, Lorna followed the Portuguese.

At the door of Miss Heppy's room she halted and listened. Nasal announcement of the old woman's sleep could be heard, despite the gale without. Lorna

went on to the lamp room.

Standing at the edge of the broad window Tobias held the telescope to his eye. Although it was no night glass, the broad ray of lamplight aided the eye to descry objects out there on the tumbling sea.

Silver uttered a shout of amazement and pointed with his uninjured hand before the lightkeeper could get the telescope focused.

"Oh, sugar!" exclaimed Tobias. "You seen her first, did ye?"

Lorna ran into the room and joined the two men. Her sharp eyes, like those of Silver's, descried the tossing masts of the laboring schooner. She was heaving up and down upon the waves directly in the path of the lamp's beam.

"Is it the *Nelly G.*?" she cried. "Really?"

Before either of the men could reply another scarlet streamer shot up from the surface of the sea, describing a long curve and winking out at last, far tip toward the hovering gray clouds.

"A rocket, by kinky!" gasped the lightkeeper.

"Ah! What I tell you, my friend?" croaked Rafe Silver.

The girl seized Tobias's arm. She shook him a little, sturdy as the old man was and firm upon his feet.

"We must do something!" she cried. "Tobias! We *must*!"

[image]

"We must do something!" she cried. "Tobias! We must!"

"Oh, sugar! What can we do," muttered the lightkeeper, "if them life-savers can't get out to the schooner?—and of course, they can't. What did Cap Edgar say, Rafe?"

The Portuguese shook his head till the rings in his ears twinkled in the lamplight, and raised his shoulders in a truly Latin shrug.

"What can heem do?" Silver sighed. "He has only ol' boat down theer. The men, heem weeling. But no can row against thees wind."

"That's just it," groaned Tobias.

"Then why don't they get the gear out and shoot a line to the schooner?" demanded Lorna. "Can't they use the breeches-buoy?"

"Why, my dear," said the lightkeeper gravely, "if you just stop and think you'll see that if the wind is too strong for the boat, it's too strong to shoot a line. Couldn't noways reach out there, with even a double charge of powder in the gun—nossir!"

The girl clapped her hands together in despair. "There must be something

that can be done," she said. "Are we all helpless?"

"Wal—I dunno——"

"*Think*, Tobias! There must be some way to reach them. Think of Ralph out there."

"Oh, sugar, gal! don't you s'pose I be thinking of him? I ain't doin' much of anything else."

"If they only have motor lifeboat down theer to Lower Trillion," said Rafe Silver, "they go out for heem."

"Tobias, they've got one at Upper Trillion!" the girl exclaimed suddenly.

"Oh, sugar! So they have," the lightkeeper agreed.

Silver shrugged his shoulders again. "They no see her out theer from Upper Trillion station. Amposseeble!"

"But haven't the Lower Trillion crew sent word, do you suppose, to the Upper Trillion station?" demanded Lorna.

The lightkeeper shook his head. "You forget the wires air down, Lorny. That is why this here detective and Rafe went over to Lower Trillion in the car. And now they can't get back to Clinkerport, even if the telephone is working from there to Upper Trillion."

"Oh, Tobias! are you sure they will not see those rockets? Ah! There goes another."

"They ain't likely to. The headland's between. My soul and body! this is sartain sure an awful thing."

The three were silent for a time. Their vision was fastened upon the plunging fishing craft. Her fore-topmast had been torn away. There was still some of her lower canvas set. Doubtless Captain Bob Pritchett and his crew were doing all they could to keep the *Nelly G.* from broaching to.

But to make a better offing was impossible unless the wind changed. A sea-anchor would help keep her head to the wind, but continually the gale was forcing the schooner broadside on the coast.

"Mebbe they'd better have beached her down there by Lower Trillion," Tobias finally said, but shaking his head doubtfully. "Anyway, that chance is past and gone. And ye can't really blame a skipper for trying to save his ship—nossir!

"She's off the rocks now. No two ways about it. What do you say, Rafe?"

"*Santa Maria!*" exploded the mahogany-faced man with a final shrug. "She is loss! No help—no!"

Tobias looked quickly at Lorna. The girl could have become no whiter in any case. But her eyes flamed. The lightkeeper was not astonished to hear her say with conviction:

"I do not believe it! There must be something we can do to aid them. Think, Tobias Bassett! Think!"

"I give it as my opinion, Lorna," he drawled, "that this here so-called absent treatment ain't going to do that schooner or them that's aboard of her much good. We've got to do something more'n thinking."

CHAPTER XXVIII

DESPERATION

The trio went down from the lamp room again and joined the detective in the kitchen. That individual evidently thought much more about his own comfort than he did of the peril of the storm-racked schooner and her crew.

Lorna wept no more; but the inaction rasped her nerves. Tobias's deep reflection made him look preternaturally solemn—an owl-like gravity that at another time would have amused her.

Rafe Silver muttered in his own tongue and nursed his injured hand. His bead-black eyes continually shifted from one to another of the group.

Tobias filled his pipe from the pouch on the mantel and then passed the tobacco to Silver. The latter produced a brown paper and dexterously rolled himself a cigarette with his uninjured hand. The other man brought out a cigar, and all three proceeded to smoke. Tobacco is said to soothe the nerves. It did not soothe Lorna's.

Finally the lightkeeper spoke:

"I give it as my opinion that there ain't nothing we can do just now. There!" he added, leaning forward to gaze through the single window that gave a view of the sea. "There goes another rocket. The *Nelly G.* is gettin' closer. If Bob Pritchett can claw her around the end of the Twin Rocks, he'll mebbe make safe harbor in the bay. But if she goes slam on the reefs——

"Wal, no use meeting trouble more than half way. If she does hit, she does, and that's all there is to it. And if she does, the only way to reach and help 'em is with the power lifeboat from Upper Trillion."

"The breeches-buoy, Tobias?" cried Lorna.

"No, no, I tell ye, Lorna. Not a chance. Unless the *Nelly G.* comes inshore on the next full sea. And she ain't going to last that long. Either she'll be on the rocks or safe in the harbor long before another tide. At full sea she might be carried over the outer reefs and lay so that a line could be shot over her. Otherwise the power boat is the only hope. That is sure."

"Oh, Tobias, they must see those rockets at Upper Trillion!"

"Lorna, it's impossible. Not from the station. And none o' the crew is patrolling the beaches. Cap'n Edgar's men air watching this schooner. Shouldn't be noways surprised if they was out there right now. But none of the Upper Trillion crew are coming down yonder to the other side of the bay mouth to the key-box like they do when they are on patrol. Dickson P'int being so high, shut's off all view of this here stretch of coast from Upper Trillion. And the telephone ain't working."

"Oh, Tobias!"

"I know, Lorny; I know," he said. "But what can I do? The light can't be left untended—'specially a night like this. If somebody could get across the bay and run to the Upper Trillion station——"

"We can, Tobias! There is Ralph's *Fenique*"

"Yes, I cal'late she's there in the cove all right," he muttered. "But who's going to manage her? If I could go, I am free to confess I don't know much about handling that motor-boat. If Zeke was only here——"

He suddenly turned his gaze on Rafe Silver. But the momentary flash of confidence in his face faded almost instantly.

"Oh, sugar!" muttered Tobias. "Rafe can't run a motor-boat with a broken wrist."

"Tobias Bassett!" exclaimed the girl, getting to her feet with decision. "I can manage Ralph's boat. I can run the *Fenique* just as well as Ralph can himself. Ralph said so."

"Oh, sugar, girl! you couldn't get across the bay to-night in it. Alone? Why, I wouldn't hear to it. No, indeed!"

"Somebody must go, Tobias. Can't—can't *this* man go with me?" and Lorna pointed to the detective, who listened open-mouthed.

"What? *Me?*" he gasped, quite horrified. "I could not think of such a thing."

"I bet you couldn't," observed the lightkeeper, with disgust. "I cal'late you air too precious to have your hide risked where it might get scraped a bit. Humph! Tell ye what, Lorny: You and me will have to go."

At this decision she displayed instant satisfaction. She seized her jacket and veil. But Tobias was looking at Rafe Silver.

"Rafe," he said, "I've got to depend on you if I go with Lorny. Somebody's got to watch the light. You savvy?"

"*Si, si!* Captain Bassett can depen' on heem," and he struck his chest with his uninjured hand.

"If you need a man's two hands for anything, ring *that* fellow in," and Tobias nodded scornfully at the detective. "If anything goes wrong here and me gone, remember it means I'll lose my job. And the good Lord knows," he murmured, "me

and Heppy's lost enough, seems to me—money and all."

The girl was already at the door; but Tobias took his time. He refilled and lit a lantern. He searched out a can of gasoline from the storeroom. He burdened Lorna with a stout ash oar. And last of all he coiled a length of strong line over his arm. He insisted that the girl be buckled into a lifebelt and he put on its mate himself.

"We don't know what we're going to run up against, Lorny. This ain't no picnic we're setting out on. But I know you air full aware of that. We may get through as slick as a whistle. Then again——"

"I am not afraid, Tobias," she said firmly.

"I cal'late you ain't," he said, looking at her with pride. "But I'm kind o' glad Heppy ain't down here to see us start. She sartain would have a conniption!"

The detective did not offer to go out with them. Rafe Silver, however, insisted on accompanying the lightkeeper and Lorna down upon the sands. The radiance of the hand lantern revealed the water-swept shore. Toward the cove the damage by the high sea had not been so great. But, as Tobias had prophesied, there were few boats left afloat in the cove.

Here and there was a craft overturned high on the strand—sometimes in a wrecked condition. Tobias held the lantern above his head. Its light revealed something of what lay upon the heaving surface of the sheltered basin.

"I see the motor-boat!" Lorna cried, knowing exactly where to look for the *Fenique's* mooring buoy. "It is afloat."

"I should hope so," rejoined Tobias. "There wouldn't be much use in trying to get across the bay without she was afloat. Hey, Rafe! do you s'pose that skiff yonder will hold together long enough to take us out there to that boat of Mr. Endicott's?"

The skiff in question had been tossed upon the shore, bottom uppermost.

"Heem no broken, I t'ink," said the Portuguese.

"I cal'late you are right," said the lightkeeper. He handed Lorna the lantern and put down his other burdens. "Come on now, Rafe. Give us the help of your hand that *ain't* busted. Heave ho!"

Lorna flooded the skiff with lantern-light when the men turned it over. It was sound enough for their purpose. Tobias put his sturdy shoulder to the stern and ran the light craft down to the water's edge.

The waves surged in, almost to ordinary full-sea mark. The surface of the basin was not very rough. What the bay was like beyond, they could only guess.

It was necessary for them to shout to each other to be heard, for the waves broke over the reefs noisily. It was Tobias's gesture that instructed Lorna to seat herself in the skiff, forward. He ran the boat out, wading into the sea half-leg deep, and then scrambled in.

Seizing the oar he fixed it in the stern and began to scull. The waves were choppy and the skiff was knocked about a good deal. Tobias was a sturdy old man and Lorna was too good a sailor to be fearful. She clung to the gunwale with one hand and held the lantern so that its light was cast over the bow.

In half a minute they picked out the bulk of the motor-boat. It heaved up and down on the turbulent water, but had evidently shipped but little of that element. Ralph had put on the canvas cover and battened it securely before leaving home.

"Stand by to grab that line that's trailing overboard, Lorny!" bawled Tobias from the stern of the skiff. "See it?"

She nodded, for the wind was blowing so strongly in her face that she could not verbally answer him. The skiff swerved in toward the side of the *Fenique*. The girl tossed the lantern over the rail, seized the line, and scrambled inboard. Then she turned and threw the slack of the rope to Tobias.

"Oh, sugar, Lorny!" he exclaimed, as he came aboard. "You are just as good as ary boy. I always said so. And if you can handle this motor——"

"I can, Tobias. I assure you."

"Wal, like the feller said, I'm willing to try anything once. We'll make some sort of a stab at getting under way. It all depends on you, my girl."

Lorna made no reply. While the lightkeeper tied the painter of the skiff to the mooring buoy, she undertook to get the cover off the machinery. She was shaking with nervousness, but she would not betray this fact to her companion. The whipping of the wind almost tore the canvas from her hands when she had it unlashed. At another time Lorna Nicholet might have let the heavy, wet cloth go overboard. But she was on her mettle now.

Her experiences afloat heretofore had been mostly in sport. On a few occasions (for instance, when she and Degger had come near to death in Tobias's dory and Ralph had rescued them) the girl had experienced the seamy side of boat-sailing. But she quite realized that nothing she had previously faced had equaled the present peril.

"We've got to fill her tank. I know Ralph didn't leave much gas aboard here," the lightkeeper shouted. "Now, lemme do that first. Then you can show me how to spin that wheel. Say, Lorna, you cast off the canvas of the steering gear. My soul and body! but you be a handy gal. That's it, now."

The boat was pitching greatly; but Tobias seemed as secure of his footing as though he were on shore. Once Lorna was flung across the cockpit and collided painfully with the bench; but she made no outcry.

This was a moment of desperation. Tobias faced the coming conflict with the elements as though utterly undisturbed by what the venture might bring forth. Fear of events seemed not to enter into his thought. But Lorna could not appear so calm. Just ahead of them, when she and the old lightkeeper steered out into

the open bay, death rode on the gale.

The motor hummed rhythmically. Tobias stood at the steering wheel amidships, holding the spokes with iron hand, while Lorna crouched almost at his feet. They had not attempted to light any running lights. Collision with any other craft after they got out of the cove was the last thing to be apprehended. Tobias's lantern was beside the girl in the cockpit. The old man's vision seemed to penetrate the darkness and driving spindrift as though he were argus-eyed.

In Lorna's stooping position she could see nothing ahead. When she cast her gaze astern all she beheld was the foaming wake left by the propeller. Such an angry welter of sea she had never before been out in.

Suddenly the motor-boat yawed, and a wave slapped against the upheaving hull, bursting over the whole length of the craft. The cockpit was half full in a moment; but fortunately the mechanism was built high enough to save it from being flooded. Lorna was saturated above her waist.

Tobias righted the *Fenique* instantly. He grinned down at the girl after a moment.

"That was some sockdolager, heh?" he bawled. "I vow to man! another one o' them and she'll be down to her gunnels."

But this misfortune did not overtake them. Lorna knew by the increased height of the waves that they were now opposite the unsheltered entrance to Clinkerport Bay. Here the waves rolled in massively—great, round-backed combers that ran far up the bay.

Tobias had to twist the bow of the motor-boat to meet these swells; but once over the crest of one, he ran the *Fenique* slantingly down the slope and in the trough between the two great waves, like a water-bug scampering along the crack of a kitchen table.

Between every wave they made headway. The tall bluff of Dickson Point loomed out of the murk ahead. Tobias waved his hand when he saw Lorna rise to look.

"There she be!" he bawled. "Please the good Lord we'll make it."

But he read, as her own lips moved, the anxious question:

"I wonder what has happened to the *Nelly G.* by this time?"

"Oh, sugar! Don't you worry none about her now. We'll get the Trillion crew out and then if the worst comes to worst they'll be right there to pick Ralph and them other fellers off the schooner—yessir!"

His assurance that they would be in time to aid the crew of the threatened fishing schooner buoyed up Lorna's heart. She began to feel more confidence. They had come through so much already, it did seem as though their venture must end successfully.

She knew what the beach was below Dickson Point, on the bay side. Ralph

never beached the motor-boat there, for it was stony. But they could not stop for thought of this. If the *Fenique* was to be smashed upon her landing, so it must be!

Good fortune accompanied them, however. A breaking wave drenched Tobias and the girl as the motor-boat came into shallow water. In the backwash of the wave the keel grounded slightly. The following billow raised the boat high and cast it speedily up the strand.

"I give it as my opinion, Lorna," said Tobias in a lull of the wind, "that this didn't do Ralph's boat a world of good. Ne'r mind. Let's get ashore and see what can be done."

Near the beach was nothing but some fish houses, and they were all abandoned during this hurricane. Back toward Clinkerport, perhaps a couple of miles, was a house in which was a telephone. But, as Tobias pointed out, the wires might be down over here as well as on the other side of the bay.

"I cal'late we've got to go over the hill to the station. Or mebbe you'd better stay here while I go. It'll be a rough passage, Lorna."

"I can go quicker than you, Tobias Bassett," the girl declared through chattering teeth. "And I would rather keep moving than stand here idle. There is no shelter here."

"I'll bust in the door of Rube Kellock's fish house——"

"I am going with you," interrupted the girl with determination. "Where is the path up the bluff? Can you find it in the dark?"

"I cal'late," replied the lightkeeper. "If you *will* go, come on."

Their eyes were now accustomed to the darkness. Besides, even on the gloomiest night there is always a faint glow upon the water. And the foaming of the wave-crests cast some radiance all about. When Tobias once found the path, Lorna mounted to the summit of the bluff much more quickly than he.

"Oh, sugar!" the lightkeeper panted, when he finally caught up with her. "You're just as quick on your feet, Lorny, as a sheep. I never see—— Dad fetch it! what's that?"

As had the girl, he had first turned to look off across the sea to the spot where they had last seen the laboring fishing schooner. A greenish-white light began to glow low down on the sea, and inshore.

"It's the schooner, Tobias!" cried Lorna. "Oh! She is ashore!"

"I cal'late you're right," the old man breathed. "Yep. On the outer reef. There!"

The girl shrieked, crouching at his feet and hiding her eyes. Tobias stared. The growing Coston light picked out the broken spars and the slanting deck of the *Nelly G.* The banker had gone broadside on the submerged rocks not half a mile

south of the Twin Rocks Light.

CHAPTER XXIX

DAYBREAK

Thirty-six hours previous Ralph Endicott had boarded the schooner bound for the fishing banks and had been obliged, because of the rising sea, to cast Gyp Pellet's catboat adrift. The *Gullwing* was scarcely seaworthy, anyway, and Ralph had already agreed on a price to pay the Peehawket boatman if the old tub were lost.

Captain Bob Pritchett of the *Nelly G.* would not have had his craft so far inshore with this rising gale, it is true, had he not received Ralph's telegram announcing the young man's delay, and that Ralph would be somewhere off the jaw of Cape Fisher awaiting the schooner's coming. Nevertheless, it was not Ralph's fault that the *Nelly G.* had got into serious trouble. He was not counted by the crew as a Jonah.

It was one of those happenings that even the best seamanship could not have avoided. Not long after nightfall, and while the *Nelly G.* was heading almost into the wind but making good sea-room, a big, gray wave rose up out of the unexpected quarter of due east and smashed down upon the stern of the schooner. Her waist was filled and everything was washed overboard that was not lashed or that did not cling by main force.

The blow carried away the rudder. And though there was a spare one in the *Nelly G.'s* hold, it could not be shipped in such a sea as this that held. The schooner was at once, and thereafter, at the mercy of the gale.

Captain Pritchett got over a drag, or sea-anchor, that kept the Nelly G.'s head to the wind for that night and the day that followed. Had the schooner run before the wind she would surely have brought up on the heel of Cape Cod. As it was, tide and gale forced her steadily, if slowly, inshore. All her company could hope for was a lull in the wind and for clearing weather.

There was no fruit of this hope, as has been seen. Toward evening another monster wave tore the drag free. The schooner's fate was then sure. Captain Pritchett could not make the narrow entrance to Lower Trillion Inlet. The mouth of Clinkerport Bay was too far to the north. The schooner could not claw around the Twin Rocks under such sail as could be spread.

The expected finally happened. It was not now far from one o'clock in the morning when the *Nelly G.* struck broadside upon the reef that lay just under the sea-level, and canted over to port.

The imperiled ship's company knew well enough that they could expect no help from the Lower Trillion life saving crew, even if all the members were on duty in this unseasonable gale. No oared boat could be pulled up the coast to the scene of the wreck. Between the ill-fated *Nelly G.* and the sands was a wide stretch of rock-strewn sea in which the tide boiled like water in a cauldron. This space was too wide for a line to be shot over it from the sands to the schooner.

Not all of the fishing craft's nests of dories had been carried away, but a boat could not live in that turmoil of the sea. The crew climbed the rigging and lashed each other to the stays, waiting for daylight and hoping only for the gale to cease.

A long-enduring storm such as this in winter would have spelled death for many of the company. But if the schooner did not break up at once they might all cling until the sea went down and some means then be found to rescue them.

The next full sea threatened disaster. Even now the surf broke against the hull of the wreck with such force that it ground upon the rocks under the strain of each recurrent blow. At any moment the framework of the *Nelly G.* might be torn asunder.

On shore the watchers had built a huge fire of drift stuff. The wearied fishing crew could see the men and women, who had come to watch if they could not aid, moving about in the radiance of the leaping flames. The sight of fellow beings cheered the wrecked men to a degree. They felt that they were not deserted. If no succor could reach them, human sympathy did.

It was in the false dawn—that lighting of the sky before the sun really illumines the horizon—that a hail reached the dulled ears of the watchers lashed to the rigging of the *Nelly G.* As she was pitched so far to port that their bodies overhung the leaping, foam-streaked waves, they could not see over the starboard rail of the wreck. And to their amazement the hail came from this seaward direction.

Ralph Endicott, as agile as any of the crew and much quicker than the skipper, who was no longer young, slipped out of his lashings and worked his way swiftly down the stays to the rail. Within a biscuit-toss of the wreck lay a big motor lifeboat, her belted crew with their faces lifted to him.

"Ahoy, the schooner!" bawled again a hoarse voice. "Don't you fellers want to be taken off, or do ye cal'late on stayin' till she breaks up into kindling wood?"

For an instant Ralph could not speak. If he had not been panic-stricken, he certainly was anxious. And here was unexpected rescue at hand!

"Cap'n Pritchett! Come down! Here's visitors!" he finally bawled.

Another of the party had swarmed down to the rail. He raised a stentorian bellow:

"Hey! Here's the Upper Trillion crew. I would know Cap'n Boggs in a Georges's snow-squall. Come on, boys! We'd better go to breakfast with them, hey?"

There was sudden and great hilarity. These brave fellows were used to facing danger in many forms, and the unexpected chance for escape from the wreck quickly assuaged their gloom.

The debarkation from the wreck was not so simple a matter. Already the crew of the schooner had each a lifebelt strapped upon his body. Now a sling was arranged with a whipline attached thereto, and this last flung to willing hands in the lifeboat.

With her propeller holding her steady against the force of the inrolling waves, the lifeboat was backed as near the wreck as was judged safe. One after another the wrecked crew entered the sling and the life savers drew them over to the motor craft while their mates aboard the wreck payed out the line.

More than one of the passengers in this rude contrivance was submerged in the leaping, hungry waves; but there were no serious casualties until the end. Ralph Endicott was one of the last to go, and Captain Pritchett himself aided the young man. The captain insisted upon remaining till the last. There was nobody to aid him in leaving the wreck. With a line about his waist Captain Pritchett leaped into a receding wave and was hauled into the lifeboat unconscious and with a broken arm.

Fourteen men, including the skipper and the cook, were thus rescued. It was an event of greater peril than can easily be imagined. Nor was all danger over when the full tally of the schooner's company was in the motor-boat.

It was still so dark that the crowd ashore could not see that the crew of the wrecked vessel had taken their departure. It was lighter out here at sea than it was inshore. The lifeboat was speeded for the mouth of Clinkerport Bay.

Chilled and almost water-logged, Ralph Endicott crouched with the other members of the rescued fishing boat's crew in the surf boat. The dash through the breakers at the entrance to the bay did not excite the party, for they were merely wretched and exhausted. It was one of the crew from the life saving station that hailed another motor-boat sputtering toward the cove between Clay Head and the Twin Rocks Light.

"Cap, there's that plucky girl and Tobe Bassett, I do believe. They are just getting back from across the bay."

"Who is she?" asked one of his mates. "One of the summer visitors, did you say? Bassett was plum' winded, and she ran all the way to the station and told us that the schooner was on the rocks. Some girl, that!"

"She's Mr. John Nicholet's daughter," shouted the captain of the life saving station. "Lives in that big house up yonder on the Clay Head."

On hearing this Ralph roused himself. These men spoke of Lorna Nicholet. In the increasing dawn he saw and recognized his own *Fenique*.

The lifeboat swept on past the smaller craft. Tobias, at the helm of the latter, shouted a cheery word. Both boats were beached about the same time on the sands below the light.

Rafe Silver led the crowd of neighbors and members of the Lower Trillion crew to meet the disembarking fishing schooner's company. The moment Ralph got out of the lifeboat he hurried to where the *Fenique* had bored her nose into the sandy beach.

"I give it as my opinion, Lorny," Tobias Bassett was saying loudly and cheerfully, "that we mebbe ain't doing Ralph's boat any good, beachin' her this way. But I cal'late 'tis more important—— Hi! Gimme your hand, gal. D'ye feel all in? Sho! I guess——Why! here's Ralph now."

He had his arm about the swaying figure of the young woman. Lorna started forward, uttering a little cry:

"Ralph! Oh, Ralph Endicott! Are you safe?"

"Tobias Bassett!" ejaculated the young man, angrily, "do you mean to say you let her go out with you in such a sea as this? Man, you're crazy!"

"Now, now, Ralphie! don't let go all holts. There warn't no holding of her back when she knowed you was out there in that haddocker. And I didn't know how to run this dratted engine."

Lorna had shrunk back against the sturdy figure of the lightkeeper. She suddenly remembered that Ralph Endicott had played no lover's part toward her, at least during these past months.

"You're—you're all right, Lorna?" he asked with hesitation.

"Why, yes, Ralph. Only wet. I——"

Her speech was terminated abruptly by the appearance of the detective. He put a tentative hand on Ralph's shoulder.

"So this is the chap I'm looking for, is it?" he said. "Do I understand this is Ralph Endicott?"

"Oh, sugar!" muttered Tobias, with disgust. "I'd forgot all about that feller."

CHAPTER XXX

A SILVER-BANDED PIPE

Instinctively Ralph Endicott drew away from the shabby man, but stared at him curiously.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "If you wish to speak with me, come up to the house later. Anybody will tell you where I live."

"Say, young fellow, don't you get flossy with me," snarled the detective. "I been waiting for you some time. We want to know what you know about that bank burglary."

"About what bank burglary?" repeated the young man, and his surprise was so genuine that Lorna sighed her audible relief.

"The Clinkerport Bank. You know well enough. Don't make it worse for yourself by denying knowledge of it. You've got to go to town with me and see Mr. Arad Thompson."

"Arad Thompson?" Ralph repeated. "At the bank? Why——"

The detective turned to shout to Rafe Silver: "Hey, you Portuguese! Get that car. You can get her around the hole in the road now. Come alive!"

Ralph stared wonderingly from Tobias to Lorna.

"What does the fellow mean?" he demanded, as the detective moved away to hasten Silver's movements.

"I cal'late you ain't heard the news, then," said the lightkeeper slowly. "The bank's been robbed."

"Well? What has that to do with me?"

"I give it as my opinion, Ralph, that some folks think you had a deal to do with it—yessir!"

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, Ralph! it is true. That—that man is a detective," gasped Lorna.

The young man reddened angrily. He demanded:

"Why do they pick on me? Tell me about it. Where is the evidence?"

A good deal can be said in a few moments, and Lorna gave the particulars of the discovery of the robbery and the evidence pointing to Ralph's complicity in it briefly and succinctly.

"Why, I haven't seen that address book of mine, nor the penknife, for a week," finally said Ralph, shaking his head.

"Where did you have 'em last, for sure?" was Tobias's shrewd question.

"I—I—— Well, I lost them."

"You did, heh? Do you know where you lost 'em?"

"Oh, I suppose so," grumbled the young man.

"Oh, sugar!" ejaculated the lightkeeper. "Out with it! This here has gone too far for you to dodge any questions, boy. I tell ye folks really think you know more'n you ought to about that burglary. Every little thing has got to be explained."

Ralph glanced at Lorna sheepishly.

"I got into a fist fight with a fellow out on the road to Harbor Bar two days before I started to join the crew of the *Nelly G.*"

"With Conny Degger!" murmured Lorna.

"Yes, it was with him," admitted Ralph. "After I got home I saw my watch chain had been broken and the knife was gone. The address book had fallen out of my vest pocket, too. When I went back there the next morning I could find neither, of course. Right on the public road, you see. Anybody might have picked them up."

"Oh, sugar!" rejoined Tobias before Lorna could speak. "*Any*body wouldn't have left the knife and the book right where they'd p'int suspicion at you as robbing the bank. But *some*body would."

"Oh, Tobias!" gasped Lorna.

"Yes, I been having my suspicions right along," said the lightkeeper. "Tell us something more, Ralphie. Why did you start for New Bedford, and then come back to town again? All these things seem to p'int to trouble."

The young man, hesitating, flashed another deprecatory glance at Lorna. He cleared his throat.

"Why, you see, Tobias, I got a bunch of mail at the post-office just before I boarded the train. Among the letters was one from a—er—— Well, from a person whom I knew to be in trouble. Serious trouble. Er—the person needed help at once—financial help. I could give that help by returning, drawing some money I had in the Clinkerport Bank, and sending it, registered, to this needy person.

"So, you see," Ralph continued, with more confidence, "I did that. I could not then get to New Bedford in time to join the *Nelly G.* at the hour Cap'n Pritchett had told me she would slip her cable. I sent him a telegram explaining that I would try to pick the *Nelly G.* up off the coast down yonder. I went down past Peehawket on an empty freight train, and found Gyp Pellet and his *Gullwing*."

"We know all about that, Ralphie," said Tobias. "How you went out and was picked up by Cap Pritchett. But you can see yourself it looked suspicious—'specially to the gossips. Ho—hum! Wal, now, lemme tell you, I had my own suspicions—and I have 'em yet."

"What do you mean?" Ralph asked, still scowling in a puzzled way. "I don't see who could have put that book and that penknife there."

"Wake up!" exclaimed the lightkeeper. "Lemme tell you. I heard that feller talking to Lonzo Burtwell one day. Burtwell's a bad egg if ever I see one. And that other feller is like enough under Burtwell's thumb."

"Conny Degger!" exclaimed Ralph suddenly.

"Oh! *That* is how he got that page out of your address book," murmured Lorna. But neither of the men heard this observation.

Ralph's face expressed anger now, but no uncertainty. He looked over Tobias's head toward the south. The detective was standing by the road, looking in the same direction. In the distance sounded the explosion of an automobile cut-off. Rafe Silver had got the big limousine again into action.

"Where is he?" asked Ralph with sudden decision.

"Where is who?" drawled the lightkeeper.

"Degger."

"I cal'late he and Burtwell air still at the Clinkerport Inn. They was, the last I heard. If they are at the bottom of this business, I give it as my opinion that they are hanging around to throw dust in the eyes of Arad Thompson and this here detective."

"What is the matter with that fellow?" broke in Ralph, starting for the roadside. "He can get that car down here on the beach if he tries."

The blue car had stopped. Rafe Silver got out. Ralph hurried nearer and Tobias followed in his wake.

"I'll drive it for him," the young fellow said over his shoulder to the lightkeeper. "I see his arm's in a sling. I want to get to town as quick as I can. If Dagger is still at the hotel——"

Tobias trotted to keep up with him. "Dad fetch it, boy!" he gasped, "I've got interest in this business, too, I cal'late. Hey, Rafe! Get out'n his way."

The Portuguese stepped aside. Ralph whirled the crank, and as the spark caught he leaped in behind the steering wheel.

"Hey, you!" yelled the detective, suddenly waking up. "I want you! Hey! you're under arrest."

But the only person near enough to join Ralph on the front seat of the car was Tobias Bassett. He plunged in just as Ralph shot the limousine over the guttered brink of the road and down upon the sands.

The big car jounced and groaned, but its engine did not balk. The detective ran after it for a few yards, shouting for Ralph to stop. But when the car got back into the road he gave it up.

Lorna was left on the shore in a fog of amazement. It was several minutes before she thought of Miss Heppy. Then she went back to the lighthouse. The storm had been abating for an hour or more.

It was not yet half past five when the big automobile swung into the head of Main Street. The round, red face of the sun was just breaking through the drab cloud banks overhanging the sea. Its first beams washed the empty village in a rosy glow. After the turmoil of the night the townspeople were late in rising.

"What do you cal'late on doing?" demanded Tobias, as Ralph halted the car in front of the hotel.

"See if those fellows are here yet. If they're not——"

"I'm with you!" exclaimed the lightkeeper, alighting with alacrity. "If they robbed the bank, why, dad fetch it! they got all my and Heppy's savings, too. I never did like that Degger."

He was right at Ralph's heels when the latter strode into the hotel office. A yawning clerk stopped in the middle of a mighty stretch, and, with mouth agape, stared at the visitors.

"Are Con Degger and Burtwell here?" demanded Ralph.

"Why—why——"

"Are they?"

"Yes. I just got 'em up. The cook's getting them some breakfast, for they are going out on the clam train."

"Where are their rooms?"

"Right upstairs. One flight. At the rear of the hall. Number eight."

This staccato information followed Ralph as he started up the stairs. Tobias lingered long enough to say to the clerk:

"They needn't hold the clam train for 'em this morning. And you tell the cook his breakfast won't likely be eat by them two scalawags unless he serves it to 'em in jail."

Puffing after his exertions, Tobias was right behind Ralph when the young man reached the door of number eight. Ralph did not stop to knock, but flung the door open.

Conny Degger and his friend were fully dressed, even to their coats and hats. Two strapped valises stood at the foot of one of the beds. The attitude of the men showed that they were more than ordinarily startled by the entrance of the visitors.

"Look out for that Burtwell, Tobias. He carries a pistol," called out Ralph, as he made for Degger.

As Ralph slammed Degger against the wall, Burtwell made a motion toward his hip. There was a heavy water pitcher in the bowl on the washstand. As Tobias came through the doorway he saw this and grabbed it.

"Ye would, would ye?" he shouted, and, catching the pitcher up and at full arm's length, he broke the heavy piece of crockery over Burtwell's head.

The man crashed to the floor amid the shower of broken crockery, and the subsequent proceedings—even after the constable came to take both Degger and him to the local jail—interested Alonzo Burtwell not at all.

Tobias and Ralph Endicott carried the two bags over to the bank, to which Mr. Arad Thompson had been wheeled in his chair to meet them at this early hour. When the bags were opened the money taken from the bank vault was found packed underneath the clothing of Degger and Burtwell.

"That's a relief, Tobias," the bank president said. "I've had the books exam-

ined, for I did not know but one of the employees might be crooked, too. This clears everything up."

It was plain that Burtwell and Conny Degger had committed the burglary without other assistance. Later the Bankers' Protective Association learned that Burtwell was known in the West as one of the most skillful bank burglars who ever "felt out" the combination of a vault doorlock. The writing of that combination in Ralph Endicott's address book had merely been an attempt made by Conny Degger to throw suspicion on his enemy.

"And o' course," said the lightkeeper, as Ralph turned the prow of the limousine toward the Twin Rocks, steering carefully through the crowd of townsfolk that had gathered before the bank, "the rascal dropped your knife there where I found it. I cal'late he is a reg'lar snake in the grass, that Degger. And to think of his trying to shine up to our Lorny. Oh, sugar!"

Ralph flashed the old man a sharp glance.

"What do you think, Tobias? Do you suppose Lorna really cared for the fellow?"

"Humph!" was the lightkeeper's non-committal reply.

"For I tell you what it is," the young man went on with earnestness. "I've been thinking a good deal about it lately——"

"Humph!" said Tobias again. "About it, or about her?"

"Why, confound you, Tobias Bassett, of course I mean I've been thinking of Lorna. And I think a whole lot of her. But she doesn't care enough about me——"

"Oh, sugar!" drawled Tobias. "I should say not. Risked her life and all. *Would* go with me in that motor-boat to get them life savers. Ran all the way to Upper Trillion when my old pumps plumb give out. No, no! Of course she don't think nothing at all about you, Ralph."

"Well——"

"And when she knowed for sure you was aboard that haddocker and it was in danger, she didn't get down on her knees and pray for you by name—oh, no! I cal'late I dreamed that!"

"Tobias!"

"Oh, sugar!" observed the lightkeeper with scorn in his voice. "I cal'late you are purt' near as blind as a bat, Ralph Endicott. Yessir! That gal loves ye so hard it hurts—jest like I said she would under proper encouragement."

"Lorna?" murmured Ralph, his eyes suddenly suffused.

The car swerved and Tobias grabbed the driver's arm.

"Hey! Do ye want to have us in the ditch? She won't like ye no better with a broken neck. And me—I cal'late I want to live a leetle longer. In spite o' Hephzibah Bassett I mean to have some good out o' our recovered savings before I die."

"If she does love me," Ralph went on, "we'll get married right away and I can

save her from all the privation she might suffer now that the Nicholets have lost their money."

Tobias suddenly groaned. He turned in the seat to face his companion.

"I give it as my opinion that I'm an awful sinner—the good Lord forgive me! I did it for the best. And Lorna never would have found out she loved you, nor you that you loved her, if ye each hadn't thought t'other was in trouble."

"What do you mean?" asked Ralph, puzzled.

For a second time the old lightkeeper made his confession. Ralph showed at first nothing but wonder.

"And she isn't poor at all?" he finally asked.

"Not so fur as I know."

Ralph Endicott suddenly burst into laughter. "You old fox!" he shouted. "I believe you were right. I never did think so much about Lorna till I began to worry over her losing her fortune. You are a wonderful psychologist, Tobias Bassett."

"Huh! Me? There, now, Ralph, you needn't call me such names, even if I did tell a couple of whoppers to you and Lorny for the good of your souls. You ought to thank me."

Before they arrived in sight of the light another car purred up behind them. The chauffeur of this was Jackson, the Nicholets' man.

"Cap'n Bassett!" he shouted, "is Miss Lorna still over at the light?"

"I cal'late," replied Tobias.

"Will you take a letter that I got at the post-office just now for her? I know she must be expecting it. Oh, Mr. Endicott! is it you?"

He had run his car up beside the limousine. He drove on the right side, and so easily handed the missive to Ralph.

"I know she's looking for it," Jackson repeated.

"Very well, I'll give it to her," said Ralph.

He looked a second time at the handwriting on the envelope. Then he put it into his pocket. He withdrew the letter from his pocket again when, an hour or so later, he and Lorna were walking across the sands toward the path to the summit of the Clay Head. Ralph offered the letter to her with a little hesitation.

"Oh! For me?" Then she saw the postmark, "Charlestown, Mass.," and blushed.

"I think I recognize that handwriting, Lorna," Ralph said. "It is that of a girl named Cora Devine. I do not know why she should write to you unless you opened the correspondence. Is it so?" he added gravely.

"Ye-es," admitted Lorna.

"I do not just know what your desire was in writing to Miss Devine. If it was to learn what my interest in her is, I will tell you that. She was a Cambridge girl—a mill girl. Silly and showy. You know the kind. She got into trouble with—with

one of the college fellows, and lost her job. Then her father was harsh to her. You know how many of that sort of people are, I suppose. They are strict with their children when it is too late."

"And who was the man, Ralph?" Lorna whispered.

"Well—I'm not much for telling tales out of school. But now that he has gone so far and is in jail, I may as well tell you that it was Degger."

"Oh! And he told me you were mixed up with Cora Devine, Ralph."

"I was." And Ralph smiled briefly. "He treated her like a dog. I had a chance to help her. I merely lent her money. She worked and paid me back—every cent. Then I managed to make her father reverse his decision, and Cora went back to live at home. They moved to Charlestown to escape gossip.

"Now, just lately, the old man has been ailing and they discovered that to save his life he must be operated on. Cora wrote to me and asked me for money to help. She says she will pay it back. I believe she will——

"Why, Lorna! you are tearing that letter up without reading it."

"I don't need to read it."

"But you would see by what she writes that I tell you the truth," he urged.

She allowed the bits of paper to flutter away across the sands. She turned her piquant face toward him so that he might see her smile and the light in her eyes.

"I need nobody to guarantee your word, Ralph Endicott," she said softly. "I know you are one man without guile."

The old-fashioned fall flowers in Miss Heppy's garden (those which the high sea had not torn away) made brilliant patches of color upon the bleached sand before the lighthouse. Tobias o' the Light sat on the bench beside the door nursing a well-colored pipe.

Out of the open kitchen door floated a delicious odor of frying doughnuts. Miss Heppy, frying fork in hand and with glowing countenance, presided over the kettle while the heap of brown rings and twists grew higher in the bowl on the stove shelf.

"Heppy," her brother said reflectively, removing the pipe from between his lips to look at it, "I cal'late I will buy me that silver-banded pipe Si Compton's got in his store case, after all."

He said it tentatively, and then cocked his ear for her reply.

"Tobias Bassett! air you a plumb fool?"

"Not so's you'd notice it I ain't, Heppy," he rejoined, grinning.

"I think you be. You don't need a silver-banded pipe no more than our old cat needs two tails."

"Oh, sugar! I dunno. A cat with two tails would be something dif'rent, I do allow."

"You was born looking for trouble," his sister declared. "For love's sake! ain't you satisfied? We got our money back safe. Now let it be there——"

"To git stole again, mebbe?" he muttered.

"Better be stole than be frittered away, like you want to. You don't show any sense."

"Not any?" he asked slyly. "Not even when it comes to matchmakin'? Was I afraid to step in where you said angels was scare't to tread? Tell me that, now!"

Miss Heppy was for the moment silenced. Tobias chuckled unctuously.

"And I killed two birds with one stone, didn't I? Four on 'em, to be exact. Don't talk! If I hadn't started that story about the Nicholets and Endicotts going stone broke, would there ever been a double wedding last week in the First Church of Clinkerport, with Miss Ida and the professor getting hitched, and Ralph and Lorna follerin' suit?

"Oh, sugar! I give it as my opinion neither wedding would have come off if it hadn't been for me. I'm some little—er—well! whatever it was Ralph Endicott called me. I cal'late on lookin' up that word in the dictionary some day.

"Anyway," he concluded, "you got to agree, Heppy, that I'm a good matchmaker. Those two young folks was drifting apart just as their uncle and aunt did. And 'twas me got 'em back on the right track. Ain't it a fact, Heppy?"

His sister had come to the door the better to hear his self-congratulations. She brought a big brown doughnut on the fork and this she dropped into his hand as she smiled down upon him.

"I dunno, Tobias. Maybe you was pretty shrewd that time, take it all around. I know Lorna is going to be dreadful happy with her man. And Miss Ida, too. Well, I dunno. Maybe you do deserve that silver-banded pipe," she said.

THE END.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TOBIAS O' THE LIGHT ***

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